

Nietzsche's Comparative Religion:

An Analysis of *The Anti-Christ*

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SUMMARY OF THESIS

This thesis explores the argument that Nietzsche's aim in his book *The Anti-Christ* is to reveal what he regards as the truth about Christianity, and that he uses detailed comparisons to prove this. Many forms of comparison are used by Nietzsche in *The Anti-Christ*. One is the comparison between Christianity and other religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Islam. Another is the comparison between different forms or even levels of Christianity. And yet another is the comparison between Christianity, science, and Buddhism, based on their degree of contact with reality. As these comparisons are traced in this thesis, a number of contradictions are encountered, and it would appear that these are due to Nietzsche's attempt to address two groups of readers - Christian readers, and those readers who are prepared for Nietzsche's radical philosophy. The contradictions arise when Nietzsche tries to please both groups of readers, to be both blunt and sophisticated at the same time. Nonetheless the tension created in attempting to address both these groups makes *The Anti-Christ* compelling reading, an effect Nietzsche hoped he would achieve.

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KEY TO SHORT CITATIONS

The following are the translations of Nietzsche I have cited. In the case of works cited repeatedly, title abbreviations are given in parentheses. In the case of works divided into section numbered consecutively from beginning to end, I have cited only numbers, in Arabic, except in cases where the sections are lengthy and page specifications are called for.

The Anti-Christ (A), trans. R.J. Hollingdale. In *The Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*, ed. R. J. Hollingdale. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1961.

Beyond Good and Evil (BGE), trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1966.

The Birth of Tragedy (BT), trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1966.

The Case of Wagner, trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1966.

Ecce Homo (EH), trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1968.

The Gay Science (GS), trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1974.

Human, All Too Human, (HH), trans. Marion Faber, with Stephan Lehmann. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984.

On the Genealogy of Morals (GM), Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale. New York: Vintage Books, 1968.

Thus Spoke Zarathustra (Z), ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann. In *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Viking Press, 1954.

Twilight of the Idols (Twi), ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann. In *The Portable Nietzsche*.

Untimely Meditations (UM), trans. R. J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

The Will to Power (WP), Walter Kaufmann and R.J.Hollingdale. New York: Vintage Books, 1968.

The following is the German edition of Nietzsche's works that I have cited.

Friedrich Nietzsche: Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe, ed. Giorgio Colli andazzino Montinari, 15 Volumes, Dünndruck Ausgabe. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980. Cited as "KGW."

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis is not an attempt to systematically detail Nietzsche's comparative religion. Attempts to systematically detail with aspects of Nietzsche's thought all too often miss the dynamics that inform Nietzsche's texts. In this case, these dynamics and the textual tensions created by them radically effect the nature of Nietzsche's comparisons. My emphasis on those parts or aspects of *The Anti-Christ* that most reveal Nietzsche's comparative religion forms part of an exploration of the following thesis: Nietzsche's aim in *The Anti-Christ* is to reveal what he regards as the truth about Christianity, and he uses detailed comparisons to achieve this. Many forms of comparison are used by Nietzsche in *The Anti-Christ*. One is the comparison between Christianity and other religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Islam. Another is the comparison between different forms or even levels of Christianity. These levels include the Christianity of the Bible read as a revealed text, which Nietzsche compares with the Christianity of the Bible read philologically, as an ordinary text; and the Christianity that arose after the death of Jesus, which Nietzsche compares with the Christian message preached by Jesus.

The Anti-Christ is a text directed at two groups of readers and this affects the way these comparisons are understood. In his Foreword Nietzsche presupposes one type of reader, the reader who really understands his writing and his philosophy: "This book belongs to the very few. Perhaps none of them is even living yet. Possibly they are the readers who understand my *Zarathustra*." It is this reader who will understand Nietzsche's seriousness, and passion, because s/he will, Nietzsche hopes, be prepared by her or his honesty and seriousness for the intricacies of *The Anti-Christ*. Nietzsche though also presupposes another type of reader, the Christian reader: "If there is today still no lack of those who do not know

how *indecent* it is to 'believe' - or a sign of *decadence*, of a broken will to live - well they will know it tomorrow. My voice reaches even the hard of hearing" (A 50). It is the Christian reader whom Nietzsche hopes to shock out of the torpor of belief. The tactics used by him to achieve this are often blunt and shocking. Nietzsche wants to reveal Christianity for all he thinks it is, and he wants every Christian to know this:

Wherever there are walls I shall inscribe this eternal accusation against Christianity on them - I can write in letters which make even the blind see....I call Christianity the *one* great curse, the *one* great intrinsic depravity, the *one* great instinct for revenge for which no expedient is sufficiently poisonous, secret, subterranean, petty - I call it the *one* immortal blemish of mankind..." (A 62)

For the Christian reader the comparisons Nietzsche draws are resoundingly stark, and Christianity is always compared to its disadvantage. The only exception to this is the person of Jesus. This is because Jesus stands at the center of *The Anti-Christ*, representing for Nietzsche the original and untainted form of Christianity. As Nietzsche puts it: "there has only been one Christian, and he died on the Cross. The 'Evangel' died on the Cross. What was called 'Evangel' from this moment onwards was already the opposite of what he had lived: 'bad tidings', a 'dysangel'" (A 39). Nietzsche aims in his descriptions of Jesus the person and of Jesus' message to recover this original and positive form of Christianity. Nietzsche's overall intention though is still clear; he reveals the misinterpretation, falsity, and deception of the Christianity that developed after the death of Jesus, by comparing this to

Jesus' original message.

The attentive readers of *The Anti-Christ* though, those whom Nietzsche refers to as "the very few," will notice that Nietzsche's anti-Christian message is tainted with a number of contradictions. One potent example of this is that Nietzsche constantly compares Christianity and science, but never says what he means by science - and therefore never really convinces the reader that science is better than Christianity. When one follows up on Nietzsche's understanding of science by reading beyond *The Anti-Christ*, one realizes that Nietzsche understands science and Christianity to share the same basic drive, to be, in other words essentially the same thing! Nietzsche obviously cannot reveal this to his Christian readers because it would ruin his efforts to convince them about the awfulness Christianity, so he leaves it for his more attentive readers to fathom. Similar contradictions follow this one, and it is understandable that the tension between Nietzsche's anti Christian message, aimed at the Christian reader, and his (mostly) implied philosophy, which the attentive reader will discern, threatens to disrupt and confuse the narrative line in *The Anti-Christ*. If Nietzsche wants to maintain his anti Christian message his comparisons must be blunt and obvious. But in maintaining such strict oppositions he risks denying the philosophy he calls the attention of his attentive reader to. In this analysis of *The Anti-Christ* then, I attentively trace this tension, following Nietzsche's initially stark comparisons until they reach the contradictions they generally entail. I do this not with the aim of resolving this tension though, because I believe that Nietzsche wanted this tension, contradictions and all, to remain as an essential part of *The Anti-Christ*.

Finally, although this thesis is not an attempt to locate Nietzsche in the history of comparative religion, it is interesting to see whether Nietzsche could make a contribution to this history. Nietzsche is simply not mentioned in the standard histories of comparative religion and this is possibly because he does not intend to formulate a comparative religion, but rather uses comparative religion as a tactic for making his anti Christian message more forceful. Nonetheless, it can be argued that the fact that Nietzsche did compare religions is in itself enough of a reason for him to be located in the standard histories of comparative religion. When we examine these standard histories, we find that rationality is the standard against which the emergence of this discipline is measured. According to J. Samuel Preuss who places David Hume (1711-76) at the center of his history, *Explaining Religion*, Hume's rational explanation marked a crucial turning point in the history of the science of religion. Hume's rationalism is what, for Preuss, earns him the title "the founder of the scientific study off religion" (1987, 84). Preuss argues that Hume's rationalism was developed into a science by subsequent thinkers amongst whom he lists, Auguste Comte, E. B. Tylor, Emile Durkheim, and Sigmund Freud. That comparison was the most elementary rational process was something Hume made very clear: "All kinds of reasoning consist in nothing but comparison" (1898: I: 375). This same rationalism informs the work of F. Max Müller who is established by Eric J. Sharpe in his *Comparative Religion*, as the founder of comparative religion. Sharpe argues that Max Müller outlined the logic of comparative religion in his "Introduction to the Science of Religion" (1873). The first element of this logic is that of comparison, and Max Müller argued like Hume, that this was the basis of all knowledge. The second element was that of classification, "on the basis of the motto *divide et imperia*,

'classify and conquer' - the classification used being that which he had already applied to the science of language, i.e., into the great families of Aryan, Semitic, and Turanian" (Sharpe, 1986, 44). With the logic of comparison and classification, Hume and Max Müller were ready and began the scientific study of religion.

When we turn to Nietzsche we see a different evaluation of this logic. As R. J. Hollingdale puts it: "It is consistent with the whole cast of Nietzsche's work that he should see in logic an instrument and not something possessing validity independent of the use to which it is intended to be put" (1961, 189). That Nietzsche would have accepted the first element (comparison) of this logic is clear. As he puts it in aphorism 3 of *Beyond good and Evil*:

...behind all logic ... there stand evaluations, in plainer terms physiological demands, for the preservation of a definite species of life. For example, that the definite shall be of greater value than the indefinite, appearance of less value than 'truth': but such valuations as these could, their regulatory importance for *us* notwithstanding, be no more than foreground valuations, a definite species of *maiserie* [foolishness] which may be necessary precisely for the preservation of beings like us. Assuming, that is, that it is not precisely man who is the 'measure of things'...

Nietzsche, like Hume and Max Müller, affirms the logic of comparison, arguing that it is indispensable for human life. Nietzsche though would have objected to the second element (classification) of Hume's and Max Müller's logic, arguing that it involves inventing schemas

that do not correspond to reality:

...*logic* rests on presuppositions with which nothing in the actual world corresponds, for example on the presupposition that there are equivalent things, that a thing is identical at different points of time It is the same with mathematics, which would certainly not have come into existence if one had known from the beginning that there was in nature no exactly straight line, no actual circle, no absolute magnitude. (HH 11)

Would Nietzsche have viewed the scientific study of religion in the same light as mathematics? It is most likely that he would have. Nietzsche read some of the works of Hume, whom I discuss in more detail in my first chapter, and of Max Müller. Nietzsche is disparaging about both these writers, calling Max Müller in one of the two recorded comments Nietzsche made about his work; "Frech! Frech und Ignorant!" (KGW vol. 7, 109). Nietzsche's summary dismissal here though, is informed by his more detailed rejection of their understanding of rationality, and of the science that was based on this same rationality. If an attempt were made to locate Nietzsche in the standard histories of comparative religion, he would be sure to disrupt these histories. Nietzsche would have argued that the science of religion rests on presuppositions with which nothing in the actual world corresponds, for example on the presupposition that there are equivalent elements in religions, that a religion is identical at different points of time...

CHAPTER 1

CHRISTIANITY

VERSUS

SCIENCE

The attentive reader of *The Anti-Christ* is certain to be struck by Nietzsche's frequent use of war terminology. Nietzsche's arguments are often couched in terms of "war and victory," of "fighting for truth," and of "waging war on the 'holy lie.'" His use of this terminology makes his overriding intent in *The Anti-Christ* most obvious - he is making a sustained attack on Christianity. In waging war in this way, Nietzsche sets up a comparative schema that resembles a battlefield with the opponents, Nietzsche and his allies, science and knowledge on one side, and Christianity on the other side. And of course Nietzsche's comparisons always depreciate Christianity. As Nietzsche depicts it though, this has been a running battle, one whose lines have been drawn since the inception of Christianity. Nietzsche argues that wherever science and knowledge have pointed to truths and realities, Christianity, under the guidance of the priests and theologians, has sought to deceive people as to these. As a result, Nietzsche argues, "the whole of mankind, even the finest heads of the finest epochs...have allowed themselves to be deceived" (A 44). The aggressive and well planned attack that Nietzsche launches against these "deceivers" in *The Anti-Christ* foretells of a major battle. He has no doubt as to his preparedness for this battle: "only we, we *emancipated* spirits, possesses the prerequisite for understanding something nineteen centuries have misunderstood - that integrity become instinct and passion which makes war on the 'holy lie' even more than on any other lie" (A 36). If Nietzsche's plan through his attack on Christianity in *The Anti-Christ*, is to lift the veil of centuries of Christian deception, then, having read *The Anti-Christ*, we must ask whether his comparative strategy is an effective one? If his strategy is primarily a comparative one, and it is very clear that it is, then what does Nietzsche reward the sympathetic reader with, the reader who follows his attacks of Christianity? What exactly, in other words, is it that Nietzsche compares Christianity to that makes Christianity look so unappealing? At first we turn to science because this is what Nietzsche uses as a basis for many of his comparisons. Science, Nietzsche claims through his comparisons with Christianity, is the answer and his message to the reader is clear; reject Christianity and embrace science. But, confusingly, when we turn to

embrace the science he so consistently praises in *The Anti-Christ*, we find that his descriptions of it are meagre. At first all we can discover are references to “the law of cause and effect,” and we wonder whether these references mean that Nietzsche accepts the nineteenth century scientific understanding of the world? To answer this though we need to examine this comparative schema in more detail.

The idea that there was a state of general conflict between science and Christianity was one that had become more and more popular in Europe as science conquered and explained more and more aspects of the world. Ravi Ravindra in his article “Physics and Religion” notes that “the essential philosophical basis of modern science was established during the great scientific revolution in Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that culminated in the grand synthesis of Isaac Newton (1642-1727)” (1987, 319). Christianity and science did not however oppose each other as vehemently as later writers were to depict it. Ravindra notes for instance that although “the scientific works of several of them - for example Copernicus, Galileo, and Descartes - were severely censured by the religious authorities, [and] many others, including Kepler and Newton, held views out of keeping with the religious orthodoxy of their denominations...none of these savants, not even those who were persecuted for it, ceased being Christians or believers as a consequence of their work” (ibid.). Furthermore, as scientific explanations of the world and the universe became more popular, so the church, initially through its liberal wings and later altogether, came to accept these explanations and incorporate them into their teachings, merging them in many instances with new interpretations of the Bible.

Despite this, or perhaps because of the often incredible lag in the church’s acceptance of scientific explanations, the relation between science and Christianity developed into one popularly perceived in terms of conflict. Some writers, such as Elliot Binns in his book *Religion in the Victorian Era* were convinced that science was understood by most as sure to win in this conflict:

Science seemed to be sweeping all before it, and in the intoxication of success it seemed capable of explaining all things. In the minds of many there was the conviction that a new age was about to dawn; that man by his unaided powers was about to triumph over all obstacles to happiness and progress. As for God and religion, there would no longer be any need for them. (p. 165)

Other writers were not so sure that this was the case and depicted the conflict in more balanced terms. John William Draper for instance in his popularly received *History of the Conflict Between Religion and Science* argued this:

The history of Science is not a mere record of isolated discoveries it is a narrative of the conflict of two contending powers, the expansive force of the human intellect on one side, and the compression arising from traditionary faith and human interests on the other. (1875, iv)

When we arrive at *The Anti-Christ* we realise that Nietzsche represents the most extreme position, arguing that Christianity has for centuries maintained control over humans. In his descriptions of the control exerted by religion, Nietzsche presents alternate pictures. At one level it is clear that science is understood by religion to be the great enemy, and Nietzsche notes that "the priest knows only *one* great danger: that is science - the sound conception of cause and effect" (A 49). Here it is clear that religion does not exert total control, but at other moments Nietzsche is more desperate and perceives the control exerted by religion to be more complete: "What does the priest care about *science*! He is above it! - And the priest has hitherto *ruled*!" (A 12). Nietzsche's position (or positions) is an extreme one but it is very clear that he utilises the popular idea that there was a state of general conflict between science and

Christianity. Nietzsche surely realised that by allying himself with science in the battle against Christianity and by presenting Christianity as so different and so removed from scientific conceptions of reality, he would be presenting the reader with strong reasons for leaving Christianity.

Nietzsche is clear about what he considers the underlying motivation of Christianity to be, which is, as he puts it, "the need... to stay on top" (A 44). Notice how Nietzsche depicts this need for power in his intentionally sacrilegious interpretation of the biblical creation myth:

Has the famous story which stands at the beginning of the Bible really been understood? - the story of God's mortal terror of *science*?...It has not been understood...Woman was God's *second* blunder. - 'Woman is in her essence serpent, Heva' - every priest knows that; 'every evil comes into the world through woman' - every priest knows that likewise. *Consequently, science* too comes into the world through her'...Only through woman did man learn to taste of the tree of knowledge. - What happened? A mortal terror seized the old God. Man himself had become God's *greatest* blunder; God had created for himself a rival, science makes *equal to God* - it is all over with priests and gods if man becomes scientific! - *Moral: science is the forbidden in itself - it alone is forbidden. Science is the first sin, the germ of all sins, original sin. This alone constitutes morality.*

'Thou shalt *not* know' - the rest follows...And the old God comes to a final decision: 'Man has become scientific - *there is nothing for it, he will have to be drowned!*' (A 48)

Nietzsche argues here that Christianity has from its inception, determined what the world looks like, and it has done this so as to maintain control over humans. Christianity has opposed everything to do with knowledge and science, and Nietzsche

argues, it has been Christianity that has been the aggressor from the very beginning. Through this unorthodox interpretation of the creation myth Nietzsche makes the crucial point that the battle between Christianity and science is pitched at the highest level. To challenge the intellectual basis of Christianity, Nietzsche argues, is to challenge the basis of its power - and it is precisely this that Nietzsche challenges in *The Anti-Christ*. The threat in the last line of this quote is revealing, referring as it presumably does to the flood of the Old Testament. The message is clear, religion will tolerate no interference. Since the stakes are so high in this battle, it would appear that Nietzsche would have to mount a fearsome attack to make any impression on Christianity. Just such an attack is obvious here. The scathing tone of Nietzsche's depiction of the creation myth, with its sacrilegious nature combine to present an aggressive and brutal assault on Christianity.

In his efforts to undermine Christianity Nietzsche invokes the opposition between science and Christianity time and time again. Close examination of this opposition though reveals that Nietzsche describes Christianity in great detail but has little to say in his descriptions of science. In a few instances though he accuses Christianity of having nothing to do with the concept (or law) of "cause and effect," and this reference may be a clue as to his conception of science:

[T]he concept of guilt and punishment, including the concept of 'grace'....
are an outrage to the concept of cause and effect! (A 49)

[T]he priest knows only *one* great danger: that is science - the sound
conception of cause and effect." (A 49)

Can we presume from these scant references that Nietzsche accepts his era's scientific understanding of the world? Arnold Brightman in his useful book *Science and Religious Belief 1600 - 1900*, presents a useful chronicle and analysis of the science of

Nietzsche's era. The science of the 1800's, Brightman notes, "was based on the premise that the world formed part of an orderly universe" (1973,266). Reality, that is the universe and all that exists, was believed by scientists to operate according to definite laws, and Brightman notes that although it was clear that not all of these laws had been discovered, it was presumed that they would be discovered in the course of time. Most of these laws, like the law of cause and effect, were perceived to be timeless and absolute, holding in every possible world. They were also understood to be the essential constituents in the structure of the world because without them the world would not function in the way it does. The law of cause and effect was made public through Isaac Newton's explications of Copernicus' discoveries. Newton mathematically demonstrated that the motions of the heavenly bodies were explainable by gravitation. The result of this, as Brightman puts it, was that "for thinking persons the physical universe no longer appeared as a field of arbitrary divine action, but as an interpretable realm of law..., [interpretable] in strict terms of mechanical cause and effect" (1973, 102). Does Nietzsche really accept this scientific conception of the world? Since Nietzsche gives us so few clues in *The Anti-Christ*, referring, as described, only to the law of cause and effect, we must turn to some of his other works, to some of the commentators on these works to determine his conception of science.

This topic is closely related to issues examined by Alexander Nehamas in his excellent book *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*. One of the regularly appearing intricacies in Nietzsche's works, Nehamas notes, is the relation between truth, science, Christianity, and the ascetic ideal. Nehamas notes that Nietzsche realises that the drive for truth informs Christianity, science, and asceticism. It is also the drive that informs Nietzsche's own work¹, as Nietzsche makes clear in *The Gay Science*:

¹ Karl Jaspers is another writer who notices this relationship. In *Nietzsche und das Christentum* he notes this: "Aber Nietzsche selbst leitet seinen eigenen Wahrheitswillen und die Unbedingtheit der modernen Wissenschaftlichkeit von dem Feuer ab, das im Christentum erglühte, aus der Moralität, die Wahrheit um jeden Preis will" (1952,55). Jaspers however does not pick up the contradiction embodied in this that Nehamas does.

We seekers after knowledge today, we godless ones and anti-metaphysicians, we, too, derive *our* flame from the fire ignited by a faith millennia old, the Christian faith, which was Plato's, that God is truth, that truth alone is divine. (GS 344)

Nietzsche here effectively deconstructs the opposition he so rigidly maintains in *The Anti-Christ*, that between Christianity and science (the stance of "we godless ones"): If the same drive informs both science and Christianity then there can be no real opposition between them. Whether Nietzsche realised that he had effectively deconstructed this opposition, is difficult to discern. Since Nietzsche is generally so adamant in his criticisms of Christianity and asceticism (which Nietzsche argues is totally informed by Christianity, and in turn infects science with the same uncompromising drive for truth), it is clear that even if Nietzsche did realise this, he did not apply it in most of his texts. Nehamas, realising the extent of the divergence between the argument of this quote and Nietzsche's general position, notes that if what Nietzsche argues here "is so, then in fighting the ascetic ideal Nietzsche (and everyone who follows him) is actually perpetuating it" (1985, 130). Nehamas points out that if Nietzsche were to steadfastly hold this position, then he would lack a position from which to criticise Christianity, the ascetic ideal, and science. How, we have to ask, can Nietzsche set up an opposition between science and Christianity in *The Anti-Christ*, when, at least in his other works, he effectively deconstructs this opposition?

Nehamas argues however, that Nietzsche does develop a strategy for overcoming this apparent impasse - he has to, Nehamas argues, if his criticisms of Christianity, asceticism, and science are to be valid. Nietzsche's solution, Nehamas argues, is to become "a comedian of the ideal," one who does not try "to determine in general terms the value of life and the world." Nietzsche solves this dilemma by fashioning "a literary character out of himself" so that his life has the "equivalent"

value of a literary form (1985, 136-7). Nietzsche as the literary form Nehamas conceives him to be, is able to develop his life in the same way as an author develops a particular literary character, as a “a coherent whole” (1985,140) that *stands outside all reality* because they are essentially only a character in book. This literary character that Nietzsche fashioned out of himself, Nehamas argues, is able to encompass all difference without becoming part of any opposition, without making truth claims about any aspect of any opposition. As Nehamas has it then, Nietzsche, through his comic style, manages to ‘transcend’ science, Christianity and the drive for truth, and in so doing is able both to maintain an opposition between science and Christianity, and to deconstruct this opposition, without any contradiction.

Nehamas’s argument though is coherently disputed by Henry Staten in his book *Nietzsche’s Voice*. Staten argues that “there is no question of Nietzsche’s simply side-stepping the ascetic ideal, as Nehamas claims, by becoming its comedian...because Nietzsche is himself the embodiment of that ideal” (1990,24). Staten argues that Nietzsche in no way forms a literary character out of himself in order to transcend the drive for truth that informs Christianity and science. Nietzsche, Staten argues, did not transcend the contradictions he made but was totally implicated in them and responsible for them. Staten argues that Nehamas’s reading of Nietzsche is not attentive to the “written” character of Nietzsche’s texts, to the nature of these texts as “a sequence of statements, each of which is generated by (conceptual and affective) forces that accumulate in statements that precede” (1990,26). Even though Nehamas frames his reading of Nietzsche in terms of the question of style, Staten argues that he treats style as a conceptual category that yields, if not a philosophical doctrine, still a product, the product “Nietzsche as a literary character.” In the resulting analysis, Staten argues, Nehamas is able to resolve all the contradictions in Nietzsche’s texts by means of this one conceptual category. Nehamas, Staten continues, is not attentive to the way in which Nietzsche is implicated or written into his texts, the fact that Nietzsche partakes, as it were, of the contradictions in his texts. Staten argues that

these contradictions are to be embraced or accepted as part of what he calls Nietzsche's "psychodialectic" - that is the interplay of logical (conceptual) and libidinal (affective) forces across the expanse of Nietzsche's texts. Any contradiction can only be hoped to be understood through an analysis of the particular forces conjoining within it. Nietzsche's texts then, Staten argues, are given to less easy conceptual solution than Nehamas grants and this is because of the interplay of forces that "exert contradictory pulls on Nietzsche's language" (ibid.). Staten's argument has particular force with the contradiction at hand, and to which we now turn.

What "forces," to use Staten's terminology, do we have at play in this particular contradiction? The first force at work is clearly the conceptual or logical agenda of *The Anti-Christ*. This as I have consistently argued throughout this thesis, is to present the reader with a series of arguments against Christianity. This is the force that leads to the first element of the contradiction, namely that Nietzsche maintains a rigid distinction between Christianity and science in *The Anti-Christ*. The second force² is another logical force, one that surfaces in Nietzsche's other texts and gives rise to the second element of the contradiction; the deconstruction of the opposition between science and Christianity. We can now ask whether the contradiction that arises when these two forces are brought together can be resolved? No, because the logic of Nietzsche's deconstruction of the opposition between science and Christianity in his other texts does negate this same opposition as it is presented in *The Anti-Christ*. Why then does Nietzsche present readers of *The Anti-Christ* with such a valorisation of science, and oppose it with such a vehement portrayal of Christianity. Because the ~~incredibly~~ stark opposition that he sets up between science and Christianity is an ~~incredibly~~ effective strategy for convincing readers that Christianity is an "error" (A 53). Nietzsche has to remain silent about the deconstructed nature of the opposition between science and Christianity, at least as he understands this in his other texts. If he

²Although Nietzsche does offer us a possible contradiction in *The Anti-Christ* that is the result of the crossing of a libidinal force with the logical agenda of *The Anti-Christ*, this is not the contradiction at hand. This contradiction is explored in the chapter "Originatory Figures: Jesus, Nietzsche, Buddha."

revealed this understanding it would undermine the force of his argument in *The Anti-Christ* because readers would perceive that there is no real opposition between science and Christianity. Nietzsche even somewhat slyly refers to the “law of cause and effect” in his arguments, which further serves to convince the reader that Nietzsche favours science, and that science really is better than Christianity because it discovers the truth about reality.

Nietzsche offers us one more set of descriptions of science, descriptions which have to do with the nature of reality. These descriptions initially lead us to some of Nietzsche’s most potent comparisons, and these comparisons in turn lead us to some radical insights into the nature of the reality which Nietzsche alludes to here.

In attack after attack in *The Anti-Christ*, Nietzsche condemns Christianity for its false and unrealistic understanding of the world. In these attacks he compares and thereby opposes Christianity with science’s “contact with actuality” (A 47). Notice, for instance, how Nietzsche compares science and Christianity here:

A religion like Christianity, which is at no point in contact with actuality, which crumbles away as soon as actuality comes into its own at any point whatever, must naturally be a mortal enemy of the ‘wisdom of the world’, that is to say of *science*. (A 47)

As Nietzsche depicts it here, Christianity is completely removed from the world. Nietzsche implicitly asks how anyone could want to believe in something as foolish as this, something so removed from the “wisdom of the world” that is revealed through science. Nietzsche’s reference to “the wisdom of the world” is not an idle one, and much of his understanding of reality revolves around the intellectual perception of reality. As we trace Nietzsche’s understanding of this wisdom in *The Anti-Christ*, we discover that reality for Nietzsche has not so much to do with the nature of reality

(physics and metaphysics) as with the perception of reality (epistemology). This soon becomes apparent with the comparisons in *The Anti-Christ* between Buddhism and Christianity about intellectual attitudes to reality.

From the outset it is clear that Nietzsche favours Buddhism's understanding of reality to Christianity's. He argues for instance that "Buddhism is a hundred times more *realistic* than Christianity" (A 20). In this particular section (A 20) Nietzsche elaborates on what it is to be more "realistic" by arguing that there is a distinct intellectual attitude involved. Buddhism is more realistic than Christianity, because "it has the heritage of a cool and objective posing of problems in its composition" (A 20). Coolness and objectivity are the first of the criteria for a realistic outlook and later in *The Anti-Christ*, Nietzsche adds veracity to this list: "Buddhism, to say it again is a hundred times colder, more veracious, more objective" (A 23). Christianity, Nietzsche makes very clear, is characterised by a different mode of thought to Buddhism. Whereas Buddhism is characterised by intellectual "coolness" for example, Christianity is characterised by the fervour of "barbarous concepts":

To dominate barbarians Christianity had need of barbarous concepts and values: sacrifice of the first born, blood drinking at communion, contempt for intellect and culture; torture in all its forms, physical and non-physical." (A 22)

The concepts used by Christianity, Nietzsche argues here, result in both mental and physical torture. The mental or intellectual torture presumably has to do with the way in which concepts disguise reality. Concepts "interpret" reality, something which Nietzsche stresses Buddhism has no need for: "It [Buddhism] no longer needs to make its suffering and capacity for suffering *decent* to itself by interpreting it as sin - it merely says what it feels" (A 23). Concepts such as sin, Nietzsche stresses again and again are not only an interpretation of reality, they are an extremely bad interpretation

of it. Furthermore, one of the most salutary aspects of Buddhism for Nietzsche is that “the concept ‘God’ has already been abolished by the time it arrives [as a religion]” (A 20). Buddhism, Nietzsche implies, does not have to interpret reality through concepts such as “God” and “sin” order for it to function as a religion.

In these passages on Buddhism (A 20 -23), Nietzsche, as noted, describes Christianity’s use of concepts as an “interpretation” (of reality). This however is something that in the rest of *The Anti-Christ* he, without fail, describes as “invention”. For instance, whereas he describes sin in section twenty as an “interpretation” of reality, he repeatedly describes it as an “invention” in section forty nine in sentences such as this: “the priest *rules* through the invention of sin” (A 49). Is Nietzsche implying something in the use of “interpretation” rather than “invention” in the passages on Buddhism? It would appear that he is and this it seems has something do with his use of European philosophical terminology to describe Buddhism in these passages. Notice this description for instance:

even in its [Buddhism’s] epistemology (a strict phenomenalism -), it no longer speaks of ‘the struggle against *sin*’ but, quite in accordance with actuality, ‘the struggle against *suffering*.’” (A 20)

Phenomenalism, as Nietzsche understands it here, has to do with the rejection of conceptualisations of reality and the affirmation of phenomena as the basis of perceptions of reality. In other works Nietzsche refers directly to the most obvious phenomenalist, David Hume (1711-1776)³. In *The Gay Science* for instance Nietzsche refers to Hume in this note about Kant: “nicht dass er wie Hume dessen Recht [Causalität] überhaupt bezweifelt hätte” (KGW, vol.,3, 598). Hume as is well known,

³ R.J. Hirst argues that the following was Hume’s official view: “One might accept fragmentary existence, though saying it is no insuperable paradox: objects are no more than groups of patterns of sensa, but owing to the regularity with which the same or similar series of sensa occurs, we imaginatively fill in the gaps and falsely suppose that continuously enduring objects exist” (1967,131).

did doubt (*bezweifelt*) the law of causality along with all other conceptualisations of reality, arguing that all that we perceive are phenomena. The phenomenologists argued that all interpretations of reality were in fact incorrect depictions of it, and it is clearly this that Nietzsche, although not entirely agreeing with phenomenism as we shall see, is getting at when he refers to Buddhism's phenomenist epistemology.

Nietzsche also describes Buddhism as "the only really *positivistic* religion history has to show us" (A 20). This reference to positivism⁴ is the final clue required to decipher what Nietzsche is working at here in his descriptions of Buddhism. This reference to positivism here, in a similar manner to phenomenism, refers to the rejection of conceptualisations of reality and to the affirmation of "positive" facts. Nietzsche probably had this latter affirmation in mind when he notes that what Buddhism "rests on and fixes its eyes on" are "*two* physiological facts." (A 20). There are other analogies between Buddhism and positivism including a rejection of theism and of metaphysics. Nietzsche though is trying to make a more subtle point in his comparison of Buddhism with phenomenism and positivism, and this has to do with his emphasis on interpretation. Nietzsche was very aware, as presumably were his more sophisticated readers, that Positivism and Phenomenism had long been discredited as valid philosophies. Notice what Nietzsche has to say in *The Will to Power* about Positivism:

Against positivism, which halts at phenomena - 'There are only *facts* (*Tatsachen*)' - I would say: No, facts is precisely what there is not, only interpretations. (p. 267)

In identifying Buddhism with positivism Nietzsche is articulating a subtle evaluative hierarchy. Buddhism, like positivism he is arguing, rejects interpretation, but this

⁴ Nietzsche's numerous references to Comte in his other works makes it clear that he fully understood at least Comte's "positive" movement. See for instance KGW 3/123; 5/69; 9/36, 362, 397f., 549; 11/82, 86, 210, 253, 263, 524, 527; 12/348, 357, 526, 558; 13/205.

understanding of the world, he implies, has long since been surpassed. Buddhism may be more advanced than Christianity, but Nietzsche subtly implies, it has not come far enough - and surely not as far as Nietzsche's voice of "we free spirits" whom Nietzsche describes in routine interjections in *The Anti-Christ* as "we emancipated spirits" (A 36). Nietzsche then subtly ranks Christianity, Buddhism, and his own philosophy (in that ascending order) for the sophisticated reader of *The Anti-Christ*. Since Nietzsche does not articulate this subtle evaluation in *The Anti-Christ*, but leaves it to the sophisticated reader to uncover or to infer, we can assume that Nietzsche had another objective in mind for the relatively unsophisticated and hopefully Christian reader of *The Anti-Christ*. This was simply to present Buddhism as a much more realistic (positive) religion than Christianity, one that does not need to rely on extra concepts for it to be effective.

Nietzsche, as noted, emphasises the priest's "invention" of concepts, and it is this activity of invention, he argues, that has poisoned Christianity's attitude towards science and that has corrupted its approach to reality. Nietzsche, in what is now recognisable as a sub-theme in *The Anti-Christ*, blames the priest (and usually the theologian) for this loss of contact with reality, in this case because the priest has invented concepts that disguise the nature of reality. We know of course by now that the priest, according to Nietzsche, has done this so as to maintain power over humans:

The concept of guilt and punishment, the entire 'moral world order' was invented *in opposition to science - in opposition to the detaching of man from the priest ...* The concept of guilt and punishment, including the doctrine of 'grace'...were invented to destroy the *causal sense* of man: they are an outrage to the concept of cause and effect! ... Sin, to say it again, that form *par excellence* of the self violation of man, was invented to make science, culture, every kind of elevation and nobility of man impossible. (A

Is Nietzsche's talk here of the invention of a "moral world order linked to his legendary opposition to metaphysics?"⁵ It would appear so since what Nietzsche is referring to here is a world order (φυσικά) that includes or is based on a morality, that is beyond or above (μετα) reality. Nietzsche later defines this "moral world order" more clearly as this: "That there exists once and for all a will of God as to what man is to do and what he is not to do ... that the *ruling power* of the will of God, expressed as punishment and reward according to the degree of obedience, is demonstrated in the destiny of a nation, of an individual" (A 26). What Nietzsche is criticising here is Christianity's metaphysical foundation - if metaphysics is characterised by the split between a merely apparent reality and a true one. This is apparent above, where the "moral world order" is the schema according to which Christians must interpret their actions if the true reality of these actions is to be understood. Otherwise people's actions will only be taken at surface value, for what they appear to be rather than what they are in the true "moral" schema of things. Christianity, Nietzsche argues, is destroying humans' link with reality by superimposing another order on the one that appears to us. Nietzsche makes it very clear what he considers the nature of this order to be though:

In Christianity neither morality nor religion come into contact with reality at any point. Nothing but imaginary *causes* ('God', 'soul', 'ego', 'spirits', 'free will' - or 'unfree will'): nothing but imaginary *effects* ('sin', 'redemption', 'grace', 'punishment', 'forgiveness of sins'). A traffic between imaginary *beings* ('Gods', 'spirits', 'souls'); an imaginary *natural science* (anthropocentric; complete lack of the concept of natural causes). (A 15)

⁵ Useful accounts of Nietzsche's general opposition to metaphysics are given by Michel Haar, "Nietzsche and Metaphysical Language," and Alphonso Lingis, "The Will to Power," both in *The New Nietzsche* edited by David B. Allison.

Nietzsche manages in this section to reverse all Christian conceptions of reality because he points out that the Christian “world order” is based on a morality that is not connected to reality. In doing so he not only points to the nature of reality as he understands it but he ridicules the Christian conception by describing it as “imagined.” The priest, Nietzsche argues, invented a false and imaginary world, and in this section Nietzsche describes the imaginary nature of this world. All of this has to do with Nietzsche’s rejection of metaphysics, which he was aware was predominant in both theology and philosophy. Once again Nietzsche refers to the world of cause and effect, invoking what is now recognised as an extremely effective and accessible alternative to Christianity. This quote, like others in which Nietzsche criticises Christianity’s invention of false world orders gives us certain insights into Nietzsche’s understanding of reality. If the Christian understanding of it is wrong, then by implication reality for Nietzsche has nothing to do with imagined schemas, imagined science, or imagined beings - in a word, metaphysics.

The two philosophers through whom Nietzsche most directly traces his philosophical lineage are Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), and in both of these philosophers Nietzsche detects the residue of theology. In particular though it is Immanuel Kant whom Nietzsche castigates for continuing the agenda of metaphysics. This castigation is tinged with irony because Kant was supposed to have rejected metaphysics. Through his philosophical rejection of the notion that reality could be understood through an empirical examination of it, and his argument that it was constructed through our mental ordering of sensory data, Kant supposedly vanquished the two vital supports of metaphysics. These supports were firstly that an understanding of a metaphysical reality could be gained by detailed observation of the order of things in the world, and secondly that the act of observation, if careful enough, could be neutral, that is it could avoid the trap of imagining order where there is none. As Nietzsche understands it though, Kant merely reaffirmed the metaphysical impulse:

Among Germans one will understand immediately when I say that philosophy has been corrupted by theologian blood. ...A secret path to the old ideal stood revealed, the concept '*real* world', the concept of morality as the *essence* of the world (- these two most vicious errors in existence!) were once more, thanks to a crafty-sly scepticism, if not demonstrable yet no longer *refutable*.... One had made of reality an 'appearance'; one had made a completely *fabricated* world, that of being, into reality. ...Kant's success is merely a theologian's success. (A 10)

Nietzsche refers indirectly here through his reference to "morality as the essence of the world," to Kant's categorical imperative. This Kant argued in his *Critique of Practical Reason*, was the unconditional command of our conscience to "act as if the maxim of our actions were to become by our will a universal law of nature" (p.139, in Durant, 1962,245). Nietzsche argues that Kant had made this unconditional command, "the essence of the world," that it had become, in other words, the new centre of the metaphysical understanding of the world. The new "true reality" ushered in through Kant, Nietzsche argues, was the "unconditional" moral imperative that Kant argued motivated and directed the actions of every individual. That this imperative is fixed, or as Nietzsche puts it, "no longer refutable," is what returns Kant to the world of metaphysics. By distinguishing the categorical imperative as permanent, Nietzsche argues, Kant re-invokes the metaphysical hierarchy of a true (permanent) reality that is above or beyond the apparent or everyday reality.

In opposing the "completely fabricated world" of Kant and of theology Nietzsche points us to another reality, one that refuses to invent false worlds, to imagine false conceptual schemas, or to interpret the world in terms of reality and appearance. In rejecting metaphysics and its concomitant mental activities of imagination and invention, Nietzsche rejects all schemas and conceptualisations of the

world. In *The Anti-Christ* Nietzsche certainly makes it clear that he rejects any such Christian conception of the world, and in his other writings he widens his argument to include all metaphysical conceptions of the world⁶:

a metaphysical world could exist; the absolute possibility of it can hardly be disputed...but one can do absolutely nothing with it. ...-For one could assert nothing whatever about it except that it was a being-other, and inaccessible, incomprehensible being-other.; it would be a thing with negative qualities. - Even if the existence of such a world were never so well proved, it would be certain that knowledge of it would be the most useless of all forms of knowledge: even more useless than knowledge of the chemical composition of water is to a sailor in danger of shipwreck.
(*Human, All Too Human*, 9)

The last line of this quote is revealing and has interesting implications for Christian metaphysics. A metaphysical world, Nietzsche argues here, is useless because it does not help with life. It is something that, although it is predicated on reality, is essentially external to it and ultimately useless for it. The only use such a world has, Nietzsche makes clear in *The Anti-Christ*, is for the priest in her or his efforts to control humans. The priest can use a metaphysical world to force humans to act not for this world but

⁶ Nietzsche's rejection of metaphysics was however, as Martin Heidegger makes us aware, an ambiguous one. In volume One of his three volume work *Nietzsche*, Heidegger describes Nietzsche as "the thinker of the completion of metaphysics," describing the nature of this completion as "the unconditional and total preparation of what is unanticipated. In contrast to what has been, the completion is new." (in Solomon, 1973, 113). However, in discussing the will to power, which Heidegger argues lies at the centre of Nietzsche's opposition to metaphysics, Heidegger notes that this concept occupies an ambiguous position in relation to metaphysics. This Heidegger argues is because of the permanence Nietzsche attributes to the will to power, a permanence that effectively makes it a truer reality than all else: "In the thought of will to power, what is becoming and is moved in the highest and most proper sense - life itself - is to be thought in its permanence. Certainly, Nietzsche wants Becoming and what becomes, as the fundamental character of beings as a whole; but he wants what becomes precisely and before all else as *what remains*, as 'being' proper, being in the sense of the Greek thinkers" (Vol. 3, 1987, 156). Heidegger seals his argument with the following excerpt from Nietzsche's notes of 1888: "We ask: why is this the *supreme* will to power? The answer is, because will to power in its *most* profound essence is nothing other than the permanentising of Being into presence" (ibid.).

for a world that has been shifted “*out of life into the 'Beyond' - into nothingness*” (A 43). However, in doing so Nietzsche argues, one will have destroyed “all rationality, all naturalness of instinct - all that is life furthering” (ibid.).

We can now ask whether this particular offensive launched by Nietzsche against Christianity in *The Anti-Christ* is an effective one? Will the reader's Christian ramparts be destroyed by Nietzsche's twin salvos of science and reality? In science and its cognate reality, Nietzsche has certainly mustered an effective ally in his war against Christianity. Even though his descriptions of what science and reality constitute are weak, this weakness is overridden by the effectiveness of the associations made with “science.” The attentive reader though will be left searching for answers as to precisely what Nietzsche means by science and reality. Although Nietzsche is stingy with his descriptions of science and reality, we do know that science, according to Nietzsche, has to do with reality and that reality does not have to do with metaphysics. In the final instance it appears that Nietzsche rejects any attempts to schematise reality by making a division between an apparent reality and a true one. Reality is what there is, and as we can gather from Nietzsche's' other writings, even though understanding reality always involves interpretation, it should not involve the positing of extraneous mental schemas.

CHAPTER 2

SCRIPTURE AND PHILOLOGY

When we turn from Nietzsche's criticisms of Christianity using the category "science," to his criticisms of "scripture" using the science in which he was trained, philology, we find similar dynamics at work - Nietzsche opposes scripture with philology as he did Christianity with science. Nietzsche regards scripture as one of the chief means employed by Christianity to entrap and enslave people, and he opposes what he regards as the "imaginary" world of scripture with his philological examinations of these same scriptures. In his examination of the Bible Nietzsche aims at revealing the truth that lies behind the "holy lie" called the Bible: "In fact, one is not philologist and physician without being at the same time *anti-Christian*. For as philologist one sees *behind* the 'sacred books' ... The physician says 'incurable', the philologist 'fraud'" (A 47). As philologist Nietzsche undertakes a "wary" (A 44) reading of the Bible, and in his reading Nietzsche uncovers one layer of Christian deception and misinterpretation after another. As he uncovers each of these layers, he compares the falsity of the religion the Bible embodies to the true religion that he argues lies behind it. Nietzsche argues that there are two primary layers of deception involved in Christian scriptures. The first is that of revelation, and this has to do with the claim that the scriptures have been revealed by God and are therefore inerrant and eternally valid. Nietzsche disputes the claim to revelation, arguing that the priest uses the notion of revelation, as part of the deception of humans, to impose whatever interpretation he wants on the text. In doing this he compares the false interpretation of these scriptures undertaken by the priest with the aid of the notion of revelation, to the true interpretation of these scriptures undertaken by the philologist with the aid of science. When the hindrance of revelation has been removed, Nietzsche argues that the true nature of these texts as literary works is revealed, and one can then approach them in a scientific manner to discover what their real message is. Once this begins though, a layer of misinterpretation combined with the second element of deception is encountered - the misinterpretation of the disciples of Jesus life and message, and the deception of the first Christian priest. With all these intervening layers we may well

begin to wonder whether Nietzsche ever reaches the end of his search, and in fact, what the object of his search is?

Nietzsche was not the only philological toiler of his era in the garden of biblical hermeneutics. Nietzsche forms one of a quartet of philologists, all of whom turned to the Bible for answers about Christianity. Nietzsche can hardly be said to recognise the labours of these other philologists in *The Anti-Christ* since he does not mention one (Bruno Bauer (1809-1882)), and disparages the other two (David Strauss (1809-1874)) and Ernest Renan (1823-1892)). On Strauss for instance he notes this; "The time is far distant when I too, like every young scholar and with the clever dullness of a refined philologist, savoured the word of the incomparable Strauss. I was then twenty years old: now I am too serious for that (A 28). Nonetheless he acknowledges these other philologists albeit indirectly, in *The Gay Science*:

If not 'God', then at least Holy Scriptures '....is dead; *we* have slain [her]. The holiest and most powerful that the world has ever possessed has ebbed its blood away beneath our knives...' (in Morgan and Barton, 1988,60, own emphasis)

Nietzsche, Renan, Bauer, and Strauss were all trained philologists and the concerted attack these four launched on scripture and the theology of the day, was based to a large degree on their philological understandings of the nature of texts and of the nature of interpretation. In *The Anti-Christ* Nietzsche explains that "philology is to be understood here in a very wide sense as the art of reading well - of being able to read off a fact *without* falsifying it by interpretation" (A 52). According to Nietzsche, the capacity for philology is one distinct way of distinguishing between his efforts and those of the theologian who is marked by the "incapacity for philology" (ibid.).

A deeper distinction though lies beneath this one, that between the lie constructed by the theologian and the priest, and the truth concealed by this lie. As

Nietzsche understands it, the priests and the theologians of Christianity, have, through their interpretation of the Bible constructed a "Holy Lie" that deceives and ultimately enslaves people. Nietzsche, like Bauer, who is probably his closest intellectual predecessor, regards part of his anti-Christian task as the use of philology to reveal the truth about Christianity, the truth that lies behind the "Holy Lie." While Strauss, and Renan might not have worded their efforts so strongly, this distinction was one that clearly informed their efforts. Ernst Benz in his book *Nietzsches Ideen Zur Geschichte Des Christentums Und Der Kirche*, argues that both Bruno Bauer and David Strauss perceived their task to be, like Nietzsche, "die Befreiung der Person Jesu von der kirchlichen Lehrtradition" (1956,53). Benz notes that all three realised that the church had formed pictures of Jesus that suited their own dogmas, though this was most radically expressed by Bauer and Nietzsche. Bauer, like Nietzsche, argued that "man mache Jesu" (in Benz, 1956,111). Nietzsche elaborates on this argument in *The Anti-Christ* in what Benz (ibid.,110) argues is an obvious reliance on Bauer¹:

These priests perpetrated that miracle of falsification the documentation of which lies before us in a good part of the Bible: with unparalleled wisdom of every tradition, every historical reality, they translated their own national past into religious terms, that is to say they made of it a stupid salvation-mechanism of guilt towards Yahweh and punishment, piety towards Yahweh and reward. (A 26).

To this list of philologists of Benz's we would have to add the name of the French critic Ernst Joseph Renan. We would also have to note that unlike Nietzsche and Bauer, neither Renan nor Strauss perceived the gospels to be a deliberate deception. Nonetheless, both Renan and Strauss argued that the gospels did conceal what really

¹ Benz notes that "In Jahre 1887," the year before *The Anti-Christ* was written, "erwähnt ihn Nietzsche mehrere Male in Briefen an seine Freunde. und Zwar nennt er in einem Brief an Taine unter den 'einzelnen, ausgezeichneten und mir sehr zugethanen Lesern,' an denen es ihm 'niemals gefelt' hat. 'den alten Hegelianer Bruno Bauer'" (1956,104).

happened in Jesus' life. Strauss on the one hand argued that the Gospels reflected the disciples interpretation of Jesus' life in terms of myth and legend, in terms of a way of understanding the world that preceded reason². Renan took a similar position to Strauss here but argued that it was the disciples inferiority, rather than a mythopoeic imagination that led them to misrepresent Jesus. He argued that for criticism to find the religious truth that Jesus presented to the disciples, it "must discard a series of misconceptions resulting from his disciples' inferiority. These painted him as they conceived of him, and frequently, while thinking to raise him, have in reality degraded him" (Renan, 1927, 283).

The starting point for all these critics in their philological criticisms of the Bible was to dispute the theologically accepted notion of scripture. They realised that once this had been demolished, the theological edifices built up around this would also crumble. Eric J Sharpe in his *Comparative Religion: A History*, argues that "the ultimate point at issue in the debate between science and religion was precisely the question of divine revelation. Scientific inquiry was reaching back into the remote past, and finding there something far different from the beliefs of the orthodox, as propounded in the Holy Writ and guaranteed by the ongoing tradition" (1986, 29). The efforts of these critics formed part of the continuum of modern biblical criticism which arose, questioning the bases of the old order as it crumbled in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As Morgan and Barton relate: "The terrible consequences of religious divisions had helped discredit religious authorities, and the intellectual avant-garde felt free to investigate the Church's title deeds" (1988, 17). The old religious culture had centred on unquestioned acceptance of the Judeo-Christian understanding of God, but this was losing its self-evident character under the pressure of criticism. By the nineteenth century, when Nietzsche, Strauss, Bauer, and Renan lived and wrote, biblical critics had emancipated themselves from the authority of religious traditions

² Robert Morgan and John Barton note that Strauss had "learned from Lessing that there was a 'big, ugly ditch' between truths of history and truths of reason, and ... from Hegel how to get theological truths from these largely unhistorical Gospel records" (1988, 47).

and they no longer took for granted that the Bible spoke reliably about God and the world. The biblical picture of the world was also challenged by natural science, and the biblical story further undermined by moral criticism and historical study. The Bible was coming to be seen as a fallible human record which spoke unevenly of human religion and history, and Bauer, Nietzsche, Strauss, and Renan added to this tide of dissent with their strong criticisms of the notion of revelation and of the historical validity of the Gospels.

Their criticism of the Gospels as revelation was based on the distinction between scripture as an authoritative set of writings, and scripture for which divine inspiration is claimed. In this second sense of scripture, the claim that the work is one that has been revealed by divine powers, that it is divinely inspired is usually the signature of it being claimed as "revelation." This, as Nietzsche understands it, was the tactic used by the priests of ancient Israel and it is a tactic that he, like Bauer, disparaged. Nietzsche notes this: "a further step [in the history of Israel]: the 'will of God' (that is to say the conditions for preserving the power of the priest) has to be *known* - to this end a 'revelation' is required. In plain words: a great literary forgery becomes necessary, a 'sacred book' is discovered" (A 26). It is quite possible that Nietzsche's position is a radicalisation of Bauer's argument which is described by an anonymous commentator as that "there is not a single kernel of historical truth in the Gospels, that it is entirely in the sphere of free literary invention of the authors" (in Rosen, 1977, 54).

The differentiation between those religions that rely on revelation and those that do not is clear in *The Anti-Christ*. It is Judaism and Christianity that are distinguished by their reliance on revelation, and it is Hinduism that Nietzsche distinguishes as having scriptures that are not defined as revelatory. Two different notions of scripture are tenable here. In the first sense a set of writings is called scripture because it contains a unique deposit of divine revelation - a deposit whose special qualities are due to its inspired origins. As Nietzsche notes in his description of

the history of Israel, "it [the Bible] is made public with all hieratic pomp, with days of repentance with lamentation over the long years of 'sinfulness'. The 'will of God' had been established years before: the whole evil lay in the nation's having become estranged from the 'sacred book' "(A 26). Two basic convictions came to be held about Jewish and Christian scriptures: (1) They are the exhaustive location of a now past divine communication, relevant to all present and future times and places. As Nietzsche puts it: "The 'will of God' had been revealed already to Moses" (A 26). (2) They are totally and equally valid in all their parts and details. Nietzsche also describes this: "The priest had with precision and pedantry, right down to the imposts large and small which had been paid to him ... formulated once and for all *what he intends to have*, 'what the will of God is'" (A 26). The interpretation of the scriptures invokes Nietzsche's ire because they have been interpreted to point to divine truths and divine metaphysics, both of which Nietzsche scorns for their obvious invention. In the second sense written works functioned as 'scripture' in that they functioned as a normative set of writings that formed part of the historical origin of and perpetuation of any particular religion: "In this sense," as E. Farley and P. Hodgson note, "there are Hindu scriptures, Buddhist scriptures, and so on, with no particular theory of their inspiration, authority, or validity implied" (1988,62). Nietzsche locates the *Manu Law Book*³ with this understanding of scripture which he argues in clear contrast to the priestly formulations of the Bible, "creates nothing new" (A 57). The *Manu Law Book* Nietzsche argues is simply "the sanctioning of the *natural order*, a natural law of the first rank over which no arbitrary caprice, no 'modern idea' has any power" (ibid.). In Christianity and Judaism, Biblical revelation, contained in human-historical deposits regarded as inspired and infallible, functioned as the foundation of theology. By contrast, Nietzsche argues that it is "nature not Manu," that determined the laws which form a basis of Hindu society, and The *Manu Law Book* is simply a record of these

³ The *Manu Law Book* (or *Manusmriti*) forms part of the enormous corpus of *smriti* (what has been remembered), which is just one of the four classical sources of Hindu law. It is nonetheless one of the most authoritative of the explicitly legal writings and is tentatively dated at 200 BCE to 200 CE.

laws.

Most theologians, from Aquinas to Luther, based their theologies on the Bible, since they took it for granted that because the Bible is divinely inspired in every part, it is *a priori* impossible that there should be any contradictions between the various parts. These theologians built their theologies around the Bible, harmonising their theological systems with the biblical message. It is against this that Nietzsche waxes vitriolic. As he understands it, this constitutes a fundamental abuse of the Bible. Not only does he regard it as erroneous that the Bible is inerrant in every part, but for Nietzsche basing theological systems on this understanding of the Bible constitutes a gross misinterpretation of the underlying message in the Bible. Nietzsche's invectives, vitriolic as they are, form part of the critical attack on theological interpretations of the Bible that constituted what later came to be known as "the death of scripture" (Morgan and Barton, 1988,45). In his *Life of Jesus* Renan, like Nietzsche, Bauer, and Strauss, claims to be working at a level of criticism that has transcended the theological understandings of scripture. "Criticism," as Renan remarked, "knows of no infallible texts; its first principle is to admit the possibility of error in the text which it studies" (Renan, 1927,5). In clearing away the issue of revelation and the official interpretations of the Church that were associated with this, these critics were all able to take the first step in discovering the truth behind these orthodox interpretations of the Bible. Once revelation had been dismissed, these critics could get to work on the Bible as a piece of literature. And the Bible is definitely a work that, because of its difficulty, Nietzsche sees as worthy of the philological attention he gives it:

One cannot read these Gospels too warily; there are difficulties behind every word. I hope I shall be pardoned for confessing that they are for that very reason a pleasure of the first rank ... The Gospels are in a class by themselves. The Bible in general admits of no comparison. (A 44)

The comparison between the religion behind the Gospels, and the religion presented by the Gospels now reaches a new level, the level of seeing the Bible as literature rather than as an infallible text. If the reader of *The Anti-Christ* accepts this non-revelatory reading of the Bible, then Nietzsche will have successfully conveyed at least one part of his anti-Christian message by convincing the reader that the science of philology is a better means of accessing the truth than Christianity.

It is at the level of Bible as literature though that all the difficulties associated with reading a centuries old text are encountered. Interestingly the difficulties perceived by Renan, Strauss, Nietzsche, and Bauer, were not with the language of the Gospels ⁴, although obviously this was relevant to their efforts, but with the literary nature of the Gospels and getting to the reality behind this. It soon becomes clear that for these critics the religion Jesus expounded was the original form of Christianity, something that, along with the life that Jesus lived, is obscured by the disciples' presentation of it. All four have similar ideas about the nature of the religious material that grew up around the life of Jesus. Whether they call the Gospel material myth or legend, all four agree that this "unhistorical" material grew up around the memory of a great religious person. Renan, for instance, notes that "no great historical event has occurred without having given rise to a cycle of myths; and Jesus could not have prevented these popular creations even had he wished to" (1927,153). In this then another level of comparison arises, that between the world of historical accuracy and the world of legend and myth. The extent of the acceptance of the scientific outlook is very visible here. Morgan and Barton note that "Strauss argued that the Gospels must be judged unhistorical ... because heirs to a modern scientific (mechanistic) view of the world do not believe in angels, demons, voices from heaven, walking on water, and other interferences with the laws of nature" (1988,47).

All four critics assume that the authors of the Gospels could have written about

⁴ Maurice Olender in his beautifully articulated book *The Languages of Paradise: Race, Religion, and Philology in the Nineteenth Century*, notes that Ernest Renan did analyse the Bible in terms of its languages, formulating an interesting theory about different forms of monotheism based on the Semitic and Aryan languages of the Old and New Testaments (1992, 65-68).

Jesus in terms understandable to modern people. That they did not, each critic argues, is the result of different factors, but all agree that belief in Jesus as Messiah encouraged unhistorical stories about him as the fulfilment of scripture and that consequently this material often reflects Old Testament prototypes, especially the Elijah and Elisha cycles. As Nietzsche puts it, "for them [the disciples] such a type could not *exist* until it had been reduced to more familiar forms - the prophet, the Messiah, the judge who is to come, the moral preacher, the miracle worker, John the Baptist - so many opportunities for misunderstanding the type" (A 31). Strauss also provides clear examples of these reductions. One of these is where he discerns two tendencies in the myth that forms the story of the Transfiguration. "The first is the desire to repeat the transfiguration of Moses in yet higher measure in the experience of Jesus; the second to bring Jesus as Messiah into contact with his two forerunners; and through this appearance of the Lawgiver and the Prophet, the founder and the reformer of the Jewish theocracy, to present Jesus as the perfecter of the kingdom of God"

(1972,545). The implicit assumption in the works of all four critics is that with the aid of modern science, which they regard as presenting a true picture of the world, and with the aid of their particular branch of science, philology, they will be able to uncover the truth behind the unhistorical myths and legends that the disciples used to understand Jesus.

At this point the similarity of outlook stops, for each critic has different arguments as to just how obscured the life and religion of Jesus are and as to just how much of this can be recovered from the Gospels. On the life of Jesus, Strauss is the most sceptical and, in his monumental analysis of the Gospels, in his book called *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, he discovers no account of his life. Nietzsche, along with Bauer, agrees with Strauss about the impossibility of extracting a life of Jesus from the Gospels. Bauer argues this in the third volume of his *Kritik der evangelischen Geschichte der Synoptiker*: "To the question of whether Jesus was an authentic historical figure we replied that everything relating to Jesus, all that we know of him,

relates to the world of fancy, to be more exact - to Christian fancies. This has no connection with any man who lived in the real world" (1843,308, in Rosen, 1977, 55). Nietzsche, Strauss, and Bauer argue that the ambiguity of the Gospel material renders uncovering a coherent narrative, or tradition, of Jesus' life impossible. Not only do they regard the Gospels as primarily a reflection of the ideas of the disciples, but they argue that when the Gospels are compared side by side they are seen to be riddled with contradictions. Renan however, in contrast to these three, was able, in his *Life of Jesus*, to uncover an orderly life of Jesus. Renan was aware of the discrepancies in the Gospels, but argued that he could still follow the rules of narration and "combine the texts in such a manner that they shall constitute a logical, probable narrative, harmonious throughout...Each trait which departs from the rules of classic narrative ought to warn us to be careful" (Renan, 1927,62-3). He contends that he is able to discern the historical events behind "the legends [that]...grew up around him [Jesus] while he was still alive" (1927,153).

Maurice Olender describes Renan as choosing "the course of Christian rationalism: he purified religion of miracles, superstitions, and other pious nonsense that in his eyes amounted to the negation of the religion of Christ" (1992,77). Renan used rational arguments to explain the supernatural elements of the Gospels and thereby to construct a life of Jesus. Strauss however, disagreed with Renan's rationalist approach, arguing that it is "impossible to write the life of Christ. When we consider the differences in order between the several Gospels, the way in which the sayings of Jesus are reported in different contexts, the inner contradictions, we become aware that what we have are no more than isolated fragments, on which some kind of order has been imposed by the evangelists" (1988,16). Zvi Rosen describes Bauer as following Strauss and believing that only when the Christian community had formulated its beliefs about Jesus, "did the need arise for more exact details of historical-empirical conditions and various events in the life of the Christian redeemer. But at the time when this need arose, it was no longer possible to satisfy it" (1977,55).

Nietzsche too is adamant about the impossibility of extracting a 'life of Jesus' from the Gospels. He is aware of Strauss's argument about the contradictions between the Gospel accounts but does not think this is an important factor in this, asking this; "what do I care for the contradictions of 'tradition'?" (A 28). For Nietzsche the overriding factor is the imaginary nature of the Gospels. He argues that the legendary character of the Gospels, never mind the inherent contradictions precludes relating them to reality. Nietzsche asks this: "How can the legends of saints [in this case referring to the Gospels] be called 'tradition' at all! The stories of the saints are the most ambiguous literature in existence: to apply to them scientific procedures *when no other records are extant* seems to me wrong in principle - mere learned idling..." (A 28). Nonetheless, Nietzsche did apply scientific procedures to the Gospels, not to uncover the life of Jesus, but to uncover Jesus' religion.

In this task too there were immense difficulties and these were caused, the philological critics argued, by the interpretation of Jesus' religion by the disciples. Nietzsche and Renan argue that the disciples at root could not understand the person Jesus, and that this is why the Gospel material is so fantastic. As Nietzsche puts it: "The first disciples in particular had to translate a being immersed entirely in symbols and incomprehensibilities into their own crudity in order to understand anything of it at all" (A 31). Renan and Nietzsche also agree as to how this translation occurred, arguing that it was the work of the imagination. "At every line we feel that a discourse of divine beauty has been transcribed by narrators who do not understand it, and substitute their own ideas for those which they only half comprehend" (Renan, 1927, 283). Despite these difficulties both Renan and Nietzsche agree that the key elements of Jesus original religion can still be salvaged with the aid of philology.

This optimism though was not shared by Bauer and Strauss. In his detailed and frequent criticisms of Strauss, Bauer developed a theory of the "individual creative self-consciousness," which Zvi Rosen describes as "nothing but the translation of the

struggles and experiences of the community to its leader and representative” (1977,56). As a result Bauer regarded all stories about Jesus to be depictions of the struggle for evolving Christian principles within the community. Strauss too, as described earlier, also regarded the salvation of Jesus’ original religion as an impossible task. At the end of his *Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, he realises that if Christianity is to survive his criticisms, then it will have a task at hand: “Thus at the conclusion of the criticism of the history of Jesus, there presents itself this problem: to re-establish dogmatically [i.e. at the theological level] that which has been destroyed critically [i.e. at the historical level]” (1972, 757, in Morgan with Barton, 1989, 45). Despite these difficulties, Strauss did provide the groundwork for this theological reconstruction through a Hegelian account of the history of Christianity. Strauss argued that the mythical narratives in the Gospels only needed interpreting to bring out what modern people could recognise as their philosophical truth. He argued that the mythic material expressed in the early disciples’ evaluation of Jesus as divine could be transferred from Christ to the human race as a whole, and that this would thereby maintain the original spirit of Christianity.

Renan by contrast, found no difficulty in reconstructing the life and religion of Jesus from what modern critics, including himself, had destroyed critically in the Gospels. As Hutchison notes, "Renan asserted that there was a positive value, an enduring truth immanent in Christianity, and there is a need for a passage from a Christianity relying on miracles and metaphysical theories about vicarious sacrifice, incarnation, and the Council of the Trinity to a Christianity relying on everyday human experience" (in Renan, 1927, xiii). In his *Life of Jesus* Renan provided just such a passage, and his book depicted a life of Jesus that held great appeal for those modern readers who had rejected the Christianity of superstition and miracles, and wanted an entertaining and everyday account of Jesus.

Nietzsche, who as noted, was not concerned with the narrative tradition about Jesus, was concerned with the “psychological type of the redeemer” (A 29). He argued

that “it *could* be contained in the Gospels in spite of the Gospels, however much mutilated and overloaded with foreign traits” (ibid.). The model he uses for his analysis of Jesus which follows this section was Francis of Assisi and Nietzsche argued that like Jesus, the psychology of Francis of Assisi “is contained in the legends about him in spite of the legends” (A 29). Renan reveals a strikingly similar understanding. “Let us not be misled by exaggerated doubts in the presence of a legend which forever imprisons us in a superhuman world. The life of Francis of Assisi is also but a tissue of miracles. And yet has the existence of Francis of Assisi, and of the part that he played ever been held in doubt?” (1927,283). In this Nietzsche and Renan make it clear that the term ‘legend’ does not necessarily imply that what is recorded is untrue or unhistorical. What is important is the *point* of the legend - the story is told to reveal the moral or spiritual excellence of the one of whom the story is told.

CHAPTER 3

ORIGINATORY FIGURES : JESUS, NIETZCHE, BUDDHA

One of Nietzsche's most effective comparative strategies in *The Anti-Christ* is to make comparisons based on difference. Nietzsche seeks through comparing Christianity to other religions, to prove that it, to use one of his more formidable phrases, "is the extremest form of corruption thinkable" (A 62). Nietzsche does however use another more subtle comparative strategy to prove this point. This strategy is one of comparison through similarity and it focuses on the originary figures of Buddhism, Christianity, and on Nietzsche's own originary¹ voice in the text. In a book called *The Anti-Christ*, one would expect the figure of Jesus, who is after all the originary figure of the religion Nietzsche directs this book against, to receive a thousand castigatory condemnations. However Nietzsche's treatment of Jesus is tinged with respect and even awe. Nietzsche's argument is that the original message of Christianity, as conveyed by Jesus, was a good one but it was corrupted by misinterpretation. In this sense the title *The Anti-Christ* is intended as "anti" the "Christ" of common interpretation. To counteract this Nietzsche presents us with what he regards as the correct interpretation of Jesus' message. Furthermore it is not only Jesus that Nietzsche praises but also the figure of Gotama Buddha. Closer examination reveals that there is definite conjunction between Nietzsche's portrayal of his efforts and his understanding of Jesus and Gotama Buddha. It is at this level that we realise just how deeply Nietzsche is implicated in his texts, for it is here with those that appear most similar to him that he makes the most favourable comparisons. These favourable comparisons do however still fit in with the anti Christian sentiment of *The Anti-Christ*. Nietzsche's message is that Jesus, the "we free spirits" of the text that represent Nietzsche's voice, and Gotama Buddha, have all found the truth about reality and life and this is completely different from the religion that is Christianity.

¹ As I use it here, "originary" refers to Nietzsche's originating of a new philosophy, or religion even though "religion" is a term Nietzsche hardly ever uses to describe his own efforts, describing, as it did, so much that he hated. In his book *On the Genealogy of Morals* though he notes that "My religion, if I may still so name anything, lies in working for the production of genius" (GW 7: 214, in Thiele, 1990, 168).

Nietzsche's conscious understanding of psychology, and its unconscious effect on him, both play an important role in the comparisons of originary figures in *The Anti-Christ*. Nietzsche's emphasis on the exceptional individual in his various works for example, led him to place a strong emphasis on the psychological constitution of these individuals. This is nowhere better observed than in his studies of Jesus and Buddha where he is quite clear about his agenda. With the person of Jesus, Nietzsche opens his exploration with these words: "What I am concerned about is the psychological type of the redeemer. For it could be contained in the Gospels in spite of the Gospels" (A29). With all this talk of psychology, it might have been presumed that Nietzsche accepts the tenets of classical psychology. This though is not the case, and the way in which Nietzsche understands the theoretical underpinnings of psychology has an important effect in his work. "Nietzsche," as R. J. Hollingdale points out, had "by 1888 [when *The Anti-Christ* was written] ... grown more and more wary of what one might call the metaphysical element in psychology - all that in it takes its colouring from the word 'psyche.' Many who would laugh at the suggestion that they had a 'soul' are quite certain that they possess a 'psyche': this unconscious legerdemain is something against which Nietzsche is guarding when he substitutes 'physiological' for 'psychological' in so many of the formulations of the works of 1888" (1968, 193). This is very visible in *The Anti-Christ* where Nietzsche is inclined to trace everything back to the physical condition of the believer, basing much of his characterisation of "we free spirits," Buddha, and Jesus around the notions of pain and happiness. Nietzsche generally terms pain and happiness "physiological conditions," even when he explicitly explores the "psychology" of such as Jesus. As we follow the text of *The Anti-Christ*, it turns out that this subtle refutation of metaphysics is linked with Nietzsche's understanding of exactly what constitutes happiness for his religious figures. The route to happiness though is through pain, and Nietzsche's detailing of this aspect of physiology is interesting to follow.

In the case of Buddhism, Nietzsche argues that happiness is based on the

discovery of “two physiological facts,” facts which Buddha argued lead to “a state of depression” (A 20). The first of these facts is the one that concerns us and Nietzsche describes it as “an excessive excitability [or irritability: *Reizbarkeit*] of sensibility which expresses itself as a refined capacity for pain” (ibid.). This fact is one which Nietzsche argues “some of my readers, the objective ones, will know from experience, as I do” (A 21). Not only does Nietzsche agree with the findings of Buddha, that a sympathetic examination of the human condition leads to a state of depression, but he also notes that it is a fact that he too has experienced. In *The Anti-Christ* Nietzsche does reveal some of the causes of his sensitivity. Notice for instance how he begins his study of Christianity: “It is a painful, a dreadful spectacle which has opened up before me: I have drawn back the curtain on the *depravity* of man” (A 6). This initial reference to pain indicates that Nietzsche is in fact a sensitive person, in this case to the spectacle of Christianity. Although Nietzsche describes his reaction to the spectacle of Christianity in terms of the experience of pain, the underlying emotion here is one of sympathy. Nietzsche clearly ‘experiences with’ Christian society, and understand the pain that it suffers.

Henry Staten is perhaps the only published author who discerns the narrative of pain and sensitivity that so distinctly marks Nietzsche’s texts. In his chapter *Nietzsche’s Politics* he argues that Nietzsche’s extreme sensitivity motivates strategies for dealing with this pain that “not infrequently produce a brutal coarseness in Nietzsche’s stance” (1990,82). Staten’s argument is borne out by *The Anti-Christ* where Nietzsche treats Christianity, which he openly declares is the source of his pain, with a brutality that often has the reader recoiling. In *The Anti-Christ* though this brutality appears to have been harnessed to serve the overall agenda of the text, which is that of alerting Christians to the falsity of Christianity and to the truth that lies beyond it. In this sense the brutality that often ensues from Nietzsche’s extreme sensitivity is not something that overrides the purpose of *The Anti-Christ*, as Staten infers it does in Nietzsche’s other texts. Rather this brutal energy is harnessed to work

for *The Anti-Christ*, and Nietzsche's sensitivity is channelled into a work that has as its aim the alerting of Christians to their dilemma, a dilemma Nietzsche realises they are all too unaware of. If we are not aware that it is Nietzsche's sensitivity, his sympathy with Christians, that motivates his style of writing, then we can horribly misunderstand Nietzsche's motives - as so many commentators have done, taking *The Anti-Christ* to be some sort of devilish "anti-Christ" invective, rather than a motivated and purposeful text about Christianity, that is styled as an invective against it. As Staten puts it, "we can understand nothing about the economy on Nietzsche's text if we are not alert to the way in which its movements are motivated by strategies for managing the pain to which this sensitivity makes Nietzsche so vulnerable" (ibid.).

Despite Nietzsche's channelling of his sensitivity into his attacks on Christianity, there are occasions when his descriptions of pain, and a similar depression to that described in the case of Buddhism, break through and interrupt the narrative structure of the book. One poignant example is the section where Nietzsche interrupts his narrative to bemoan the fact that people can still be Christians despite knowing the truth about Christianity. He begins with these now famous words: "At this point I shall not suppress a sigh. There are days when I am haunted by a feeling blacker than the blackest melancholy" (A 38). Similarly, at an earlier point Nietzsche expresses sensitivity, in this case to the pain of illness, an illness caught from modern living:

'I know not which way to turn; I am everything that knows not which to turn' - sighs modern man....It was from *this* modernity that we were ill - from lazy peace, from cowardly compromise, from the whole virtuous uncleanliness of modern Yes and No. This tolerance and *largeur* of heart which 'forgives' everything because it 'understands' everything is sirocco to us. Better to live among ice than among modern virtues and other south winds! (A 1).

The metaphor of the warm and sultry Sahara simoon or sirocco wind which reaches southern Europe expresses well Nietzsche's sensitivity to his surroundings. In the same way as this wind invokes a lassitude comparable to an illness, so too did "modern virtues." Nietzsche is also saying here that he has, in a similar fashion to Buddha, discerned the facts of living, in this case the modern living of his era, and has realised that it is better not to live among these conditions.

While Nietzsche's sensitivity certainly motivates his brutal attacks on Christianity, it also guides his sympathetic portrayals of Jesus and Buddha. This is achieved through Nietzsche's apparent identification with these figures, an identification which is coloured by his understanding of psychology. After ridiculing Renan in this section for typifying Jesus as a genius, Nietzsche continues in the following section to detail the precise physiological factors that determined Jesus' actions. Nietzsche argues, in words very similar to those used to describe the "two physiological facts" discerned by Buddha, that Jesus had "an extreme capacity for suffering and irritation which no longer wants to be 'touched' at all because it feels every contact too deeply" (A 30).

At this point an interesting pattern emerges in Nietzsche's depictions of Jesus and Buddha; sensitivity and "an extreme capacity for pain" lead ultimately to happiness. Nietzsche notes this about Jesus: "The fear of pain, even of the infinitely small in pain - cannot end otherwise than in a religion of love" (A 30). As Nietzsche perceives it, pain determined Jesus' religious orientation. The similarities between Buddha and Jesus regarding happiness are not coincidental, Nietzsche openly compares the two, both in *The Anti-Christ* and in his unpublished notes. In autumn of 1885 Nietzsche recorded this in his notes: "Was Christus und Buddha auszuzeichnen scheint: es scheint das innere Glück zu sein, das sie religiös mache" (KGW, vol 12, p.12). Nietzsche is slightly hesitant in this note, arguing that it appears (*es scheint*) that inner happiness (*innere Glück*) is what makes Jesus and Buddha religious. This hesitancy has disappeared by the time of *The Anti-Christ*: "One sees *what* came to an

end with the death on the Cross: a new, an absolutely primary beginning to a Buddhistic peace movement, to an actual and *not* merely promised *happiness on earth*" (A 42)². Jesus, Nietzsche makes it clear, founded a movement similar to that founded by Buddha, a movement which brought happiness³. To clarify just what Nietzsche considers this "Buddhistic peace movement" to be here are some of his descriptions of it:

"He opposes it [depression] with ... with caution towards all emotions which produce gall, which heat the blood; no anxiety, either for oneself or for others. He demands ideas which produce repose or cheerfulness." (A 20)

"His teaching resists nothing *more* than it resists the feeling of revengefulness, of antipathy, of *ressentiment*...and quite rightly: it is precisely these emotions which would be thoroughly *unhealthy* with regard to the main dietetic objective" (A 20).

"The supreme goal is cheerfulness, stillness, absence of desire, and this goal is *achieved*" (A 21).

It seems astonishing that both Jesus and Buddha could have so much in common, that both could derive similar religions, religions of happiness and that their derivations (from pain) could follow such a similar pattern. Notice for instance that the first mention in Nietzsche's list of what Buddha's goal constitutes is cheerfulness. This

² Nietzsche makes it very clear throughout *The Anti-Christ* that whereas Jesus founded a religion of happiness, the Christianity that followed was a religion which promoted unhappiness - "a conspiracy against health, beauty, well-constitutedness, bravery, intellect, *benevolence* of soul, *against life itself*..." (A 62).

³ Ernst Benz notes that Nietzsche derived his clear identification of Jesus with Buddha from Schopenhauer: "Vor allem darin erweist sich Nietzsche als Schüler Schopenhauers, dass seine Auffassung von der Person Jesu durch und durch von seiner Analogie mit der Gestalt Buddhas ist" (1956, 70). Nietzsche though, as I argue below, presents Buddha, and consequently Jesus, in a much more positive way than Schopenhauer.

astonishment is reduced though when their similarities are reconciled with further similarities to Nietzsche's understanding and experience of the world, similarities that are examined below.

In the light of nineteenth century western scholarship on Buddhism, Nietzsche's emphasis on the happiness of Buddhism is an interesting divergence from the standard scheme. Most European (and American for that matter) Buddhist scholars argued that Buddhism is a pessimistic and nihilistic religion. The influential comparative religionist F. Max Müller for instance interpreted the Buddhist tradition as atheistic and nihilistic, describing it in this way: "How a religion which taught the annihilation of all existence, of all thought, of all individuality and personality, as the highest object of all endeavours, could have laid hold of the minds of millions of human beings ... is a riddle which no one has been able to solve" (1857, 24).

While it is quite possible that Nietzsche read this particular essay of Müller's, he definitely read the works of Arthur Schopenhauer and Richard Wagner on Buddhism, both of whom emphasized what they interpreted as its pessimistic and nihilistic aspects. Raymond Schwab in his book *The Oriental Renaissance*, divides Schopenhauer's contact with India into two periods. It is in the second period Schwab argues, that Schopenhauer encountered Buddhist doctrine, an encounter that he argues hardened Schopenhauer's understanding of Indian traditions. Nirvana, which Schwab argues Schopenhauer understood as the release from suffering of "birth, old age, sickness, and death," was clearly perceived by Schopenhauer as something positive that involved the cessation of the individual will. Nonetheless this was something he believed to be "inconceivable by us [Europeans]" (Schwab, 1984, 427-429). Ultimately though when Schopenhauer extended his interpretation of Nirvana beyond the scope of the individual will to the universal will, so as to include all humans, he understood it to entail stopping the source of life - the will to reproduce: "The satisfaction of the reproductive impulse is utterly and intrinsically reprehensible because it is the strongest

affirmation of the lust for life" (Wallace, no date, 29). Nietzsche though rejects this argument of Schopenhauer's, arguing that this nihilistic hostility to life of his was caused by his exclusive focus on (pity for) the suffering aspect of existence:

"Schopenhauer was hostile to life: *therefore* pity became for him a virtue" (A 7).

Richard Wagner relied to a great extent of on Schopenhauer's writings for his understanding of Buddhism, and this is discernible where, as Schwab notes, "in *Tristan* and in *Parsifal*, as in a two-act play, the drama of the will-not-to-live was performed" (1984,441). Understandably then, Nietzsche, who affirmed life so energetically, characterised Wagner in *The Case of Wagner* as flattering "every nihilistic Buddhistic instinct" (p.47, in Durant, 1962, 356), and argued that since Schopenhauer and Wagner became Buddhists, "Europe is threatened with a new Buddhism" (BGE 14).

There are two possible sources for Nietzsche's positive and different outlook on Buddhism. The one lies with his rejection of Schopenhauer's philosophy of the universal will, and his affirmation of the individual will to power, something which must have forced Nietzsche to re-evaluate his understanding of Schopenhauer's depiction of Buddhism. The other source is more definite and it lies with a book called *Buddha: Sein Leben, seine Lehre, seine Gemeinde*, written by Hermann Oldenburg and published just seven years before Nietzsche wrote *The Anti-Christ*. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, relying on Nietzsche's personal notes attribute this book as the source of Nietzsche's comments on Buddhism in *The Anti-Christ* (KGW vol. 14, 440). Thomas Tweed argues that of all the western commentators of this period, Oldenburg offered the most subtle reading of the Buddhist tradition. Importantly, Oldenburg "found three attitudes towards nirvana in the Pali canon. First, there was Buddha's dismissal of all such metaphysical concerns. Second, there were the implicit suggestions by the writers of the sacred texts that some early followers believed that nirvana ultimately meant annihilation. Finally, there were hints that others rejected the nihilistic interpretation" (Tweed, 1992, 123). Although Oldenburg

concentrated his efforts here on the Pali scriptures of the Theravada tradition, Tweed notes that scholars recognised that “the plurality of perspectives in the later Hīnyana and Mahayana texts and traditions ... made finding a single Buddhist answer to questions about the character of ultimate reality ... difficult, if not impossible” (ibid.). It is likely then that Nietzsche followed the more positive of Oldenburg’s interpretations of the Theravādan tradition, and infused this with his own philosophical understanding of life. Nonetheless, Nietzsche’s interpretation of Buddhism is not all rosy and at one point he characterises it as belonging together with Christianity “as nihilistic religions - they are *decadence* religions” (A 20). This might have to do with the general reception and understanding of Buddhism in Europe. It might also have to do with his argument that Buddhism is like certain European philosophical movements of which Nietzsche was critical, an analogy explored in more detail below.

To return to the thread of happiness connecting Jesus, Buddha and Nietzsche’s own originary voice. Nietzsche is also explicit in the formulations of his originary voice that happiness follows difficulty. Early on in *The Anti-Christ* he asks “What is happiness,” and immediately answers: “The feeling that power *increases* - that a resistance is overcome” (A 3)⁴. Although the type of “resistance” is not specified, clearly much of this has to do with the pain and depression that he has experienced. This is made clear in the first section of *The Anti-Christ* where Nietzsche describes the movement whereby depression, described here as “gloom,” is overcome:

We were brave enough, we spared neither ourselves nor others: but for long we did not know *where* to apply our courage. We became gloomy, we were called fatalists. *Our* fatality - was the plenitude, the tension, the blocking-up of our forces. We thirsted for lightning and action, of all things we kept ourselves furthest from the happiness of the weaklings, from

⁴ When Nietzsche discusses power in this way he need not be referring to the power of mastery, of dominance over others. In this context it is most likely that Nietzsche is referring to the sense of affirmation of life one achieves when one has overcome difficulties. I discuss this and other issues in my chapter “All suffering existence.”

'resignation'There was a thunderstorm in our air, the nature which we are grew dark - *for we had no road*. Formula of our happiness: a Yes, a No, a straight line, a *goal*... (A 1).

This section makes it clear that the "we" of the text arrived at happiness after descending to the depths of depression. The message of this paragraph is that those who fight their way through the pain of depression, who master their extreme sensitivity end up being happy. Nietzsche here also gives a clue as to the exact nature of this happiness - "a Yes, a No, a straight line, a goal." This is not as enigmatic as it first appears for it describes the path out of the lassitude of a modernity corrupted by Christianity. Nietzsche implies in this section that once the real choices, the "Yes" and the "No," have been discerned, then this enables the path out of this gloom invoking environment to be sighted. One can presume that the "Yes" is to the happiness Nietzsche has found, the "No" is to the Christianity and modernity he leaves behind, and the "straight line" is the route that has finally been found that leads out of the miasma of modernity to the "goal" of happiness.

Although we have not yet touched on the exact *nature* of the happiness experienced by Jesus, Buddha and the "we" of the text, we have discerned some important comparative strategies used by Nietzsche. Nietzsche's comparative strategies are based on his understanding of psychology and on his psychological identification with the figures of Jesus and Buddha. The elements of comparison have been a specific understanding of psychology mixed with the personal experience. As Nietzsche understands it, religion is the discovery of true happiness by the extremely sensitive individual. Nietzsche's intent focus on the exceptional individual has a lot to do with his fear of and opposition to the masses - something I explore in detail in the following chapter. What has been revealed thus far is that Nietzsche does effect a comparative religion based on his identification with two historically conspicuous individuals. This exploration of implicit and explicit comparisons though is far from

over, and what looms large at the moment is the issue of what exactly the happiness discovered in *The Anti-Christ* constitutes? To answer this let us first look at those who reflect Nietzsche best, Jesus and Buddha. However, it is Nietzsche's portrayal of Jesus that best conveys what Nietzsche understands by happiness, and so it is to Jesus that we now turn.

Deciphering Nietzsche's understanding of happiness requires comprehension of his philosophy of language and his epistemology. Without this it is difficult to understand what Nietzsche means when he describes Jesus' "physiological *habitus* [condition]" as an "instinctive hatred of every reality" (A 29), and describes Jesus as "a being immersed entirely in symbols and incomprehensibilities" (A 31). In *The Anti-Christ* Nietzsche does not describe his philosophical arguments, but his tacit deployment of his philosophy does expose his position, and nowhere is this better demonstrated than with the person of Jesus where Nietzsche's depiction is layered with his complex philosophy.

So much of Nietzsche's comparative religion has to do with perceptions of reality and this certainly comes to the fore with his depictions of Jesus. What Nietzsche enunciates with Jesus is a sophisticated understanding of reality, arguing that Jesus refused to accept everyday understandings of reality. Nietzsche argues that what most people take as concrete realities in the world, were taken by Jesus to be references to something else, to the truth about reality. Nietzsche argues that all things were for Jesus indicative of the symbolic or metaphoric nature of reality: Jesus "understood ... everything pertaining to nature, time, space, history, only as signs, as occasion for metaphor." (A 34). The nature of this reality perceived by Jesus is that everything is relative, that all things, like signs, are known by reference to other things, and that nothing has a fixed or static identity.

Poststructuralist critics generally argue that Nietzsche has deconstructed the notion of the self. J Hillis Miller for instance argues that the topic of "the

decomposition of the self ... runs like a red thread through all Nietzsche's work" (1981,248). Hillis Miller argues that for Nietzsche the fundamental activity of the mind is the activity of interpretation and that "all interpretation is false interpretation. It is an aberrant reading dependent on simplifying, schematizing, omitting, a making equal of things which are not equal" (1981,249). Through a detailed analysis of *The Will to Power*, Hillis Miller shows that Nietzsche deconstructs the notion of a fixed, static, and independent external reality by showing how it is a reality constructed by a false interpretation of the world. Hillis Miller also argues that Nietzsche similarly deconstructs the idea of the substantial ego, of a fixed and static inner world of subjectivity: "The individual entities of which the soul is supposed to be constituted - thoughts, feelings, faculties, and so on - are held by Nietzsche not to exist as such but only to be the fictitious products of acts of simplifying construction" (ibid.,250). Although in *The Anti-Christ* the deconstruction of the self is not as well articulated as in *The Will to Power*, it is observable in Nietzsche's depictions of Jesus, Buddha, and the voice of "we free spirits." Nietzsche's characterisations of the happiness achieved by these figures, as examined below, display a radically deconstructed view of reality, both internal and external. Nonetheless, it is not the case that Nietzsche's depictions of all individuals in *The Anti-Christ* is a deconstructive one. Nietzsche's depicts the strong, and masterful type of individual for instance, as bounded and substantial with a strong sense of ego - something that is needed if the strong type really is to dominate and rule over others. Since these strong types are presented as the antithesis of the weak Christian masses, one can argue that in his presentation of individuals Nietzsche had two dominant strategies for opposing Christianity. One is a presentation of Jesus as a radically deconstructed figure, so completely different from Christianity's bounded and controlled individuals. The other strategy is a presentation of the strong individual who affirms life by mastering others, and these individuals are explicitly contrasted by Nietzsche with the weak Christian individual who denies life because life is seen as so terrible, and whose fear of life allows this individual to be dominated by the strong

type.

Nietzsche spends a lot of time exploring his deconstructed understanding of reality through Jesus. Using a sophisticated understanding of language in his depictions of Jesus for example, Nietzsche deconstructs everyday understanding of (Christian) reality. Nietzsche's first example of a concept that was used by Jesus that does not refer to the reality commonly assigned to it is "[t]he concept 'the Son of Man.'" This concept, Nietzsche argues, does not refer to a "concrete person belonging to history, or to anything individual or unique, but refers to an 'eternal' fact, a psychological symbol freed from the time concept" (A 34). Nietzsche argues that in this case it is wrong to link this concept with a particular reality, as Christians have done since Jesus' death. There is no such link Nietzsche argues, the concept 'the Son of Man' is a symbol, it does not convey a concrete, essential reality but something beyond the notion of individuality, something beyond time. The meaning of any word for Jesus could not be understood by referring to some thing in this world. The meaning of a word was something linked to the mysteriously relative nature of reality.

Another example of incorrect linking is with the concept "the kingdom of God." Contrary to what is commonly designated by it, Nietzsche argues that "The 'kingdom of God' is not something one waits for...it does not come 'in a thousand years'" (ibid.). As with the previous example, Nietzsche argues that this concept does not represent a determinate reality. It does not represent any particular thing, rather "it has no yesterday or tomorrow, - it is an experience within a heart; it is everywhere, it is nowhere..." (ibid.). Although two examples of religious concepts have been given here, Nietzsche makes it very clear that if Jesus is to be understood at all, then it must be realised that for Jesus no concept could be taken literally. No sign or word used by Jesus could be taken to signify a concrete reality. Nietzsche realises that "chance...determines the environment, the language, the preparatory schooling of a particular configuration of concepts" (A 32). But this, Nietzsche cautions us, is not a licence to link concepts used with definite realities:

One must be careful not to see in this anything but a sign language, a semiotic, an occasion for metaphors. It is precisely on condition that nothing he says is taken literally that this antirealist can speak at all (ibid.).

What is understood here by "antirealist" is that Jesus refuses to make the commonplace or realistic linking of word, concept and object. What Jesus refers to has nothing to do with the ordinary realities of this world. Jesus, as Nietzsche makes clear, refers through what he says to non-literal truths, to truths beyond the compass of words and concepts.

In these deconstructions of particular religious concepts, Nietzsche gives practical demonstrations of a philosophy he understood and delineated as early as 1878. It is in these early works that Nietzsche most clearly argues against the classical presentation of the sign⁵. The classical schema is typified by the understanding that the sign or word is a representation of the idea which itself represents the object perceived. Perhaps the most important and necessary characteristic of signs in the classical schema is that they must somehow take care of their own meaning, have their meaning somehow written into them. This means that signs have determined representations so that when the same sign is repeated it is present to itself. In other words, meaning and intention must be present to the signs, must be carried by the signs. Another necessary element is that the identity of the sign is maintained. Communication takes place when the idea conveyed by the sign is perfectly re-presented to the hearer by means of the sign. This understanding of language has important repercussions in the area of the perception of reality. Nietzsche describes these repercussions in this way:

The significance of language for the evolution of culture resides in the fact that in language man set a world of his own over against the other world. ...

⁵ A very thorough account of the origins of Nietzsche's philosophy of language is offered by Claudia Crawford in her *The Beginnings of Nietzsche's Theory of Language*, 1988, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin.

To the extent that man has for long ages believed in the concepts and names of things as in *aeternae veritates* [eternal truths] he has appropriated to himself that pride by which he raised himself above the animal: he really thought that in language he possessed knowledge of the world. The sculptor of language was not so modest as to believe that he was only giving things designations, he conceived rather that with words he was expressing supreme knowledge of things" (*Human All Too Human* 11).

What Nietzsche is arguing here is that language is a mechanism which fosters a false view of reality. Language, Nietzsche argues, provides the basis for the metaphysical view of the world. According to this view, everything in the world has an essential component, a component that Nietzsche describes in *The Wanderer and His Shadow* as "what is true in things" (11). This component Nietzsche argues, is illusory, and reality is not composed in this way. In deconstructing the link between the word and its designated reality, Nietzsche is saying that there is no necessary element in things that can be isolated, categorised and named. Things cannot simply be known by naming them, reality is not static and fixed, but fluid and ultimately indescribable. Jesus, as Nietzsche portrays him, is opposed to any possibility of fixing the identity of things: "[H]e cares nothing for what is fixed: the word *killeth*, everything fixed *killeth*. The concept, the experience 'life' in the only form he knows it is opposed to any kind of word, formula, faith, dogma" (A 32)⁶.

Although Nietzsche does not go into the same amount of detail with the "we" of the text and with his descriptions of Buddha, it is nonetheless clear that the happiness that has been discovered in these instances is similar to that discovered by Jesus. When Nietzsche describes Jesus as "the mountain, lake and field preacher,

⁶ Nietzsche's descriptions of Jesus are often strikingly similar to those offered by Renan, and although Renan's descriptions are a lot more light-hearted than Nietzsche's, it is nonetheless clear that Nietzsche relied on Renan here. Notice the similarity in the descriptions of in this quote of Renan's with Nietzsche's description above: "Jesus had neither dogma nor system, but a fixed personal resolution which, exceeding in intensity every other created will, governs to this hour the destinies of humanity" (Renan, 1927, 30).

whose appearance strikes one as that of a Buddha on a soil very like that of India (A 31), it is clear that he understands Jesus to have some similarities with Buddha. Since the similarities do not lie with the religions named after them - "they are distinguished from one another in the most remarkable way" (A 20) - it is deducible that the similarities have to do with the teachings enunciated by these two figures. Nietzsche for instance argues that Buddha opposed the "tyranny of concepts," and this is similar to Jesus' opposition to any "kind of word, formula, faith, dogma" (A 32). Buddha, Nietzsche argues, took exception to the physiological condition of "an over-intellectuality, a too great preoccupation with concepts and logical procedures under which the personal instinct has sustained harm to the advantage of the 'impersonal'" (A 20). Buddha, as is well known, opposed any attempt to contain and fix reality, and this rejection of the preoccupation with concepts is a reference to this. Buddha opposed any systematic explanation of reality. Theoretical or conceptual explanations of reality all too often depict it as static, and this Buddha pointed out, has nothing to do with a reality where "whatever is brought into being contains within itself the inherent necessity of dissolution" (in Smart, 1984, 105). In this sense concepts, or conceptual explanations of reality can sustain harm to the "personal" because they present us with a false view of the world and this encourages actions based on these false beliefs. Interestingly this opposition to concepts is similar to Nietzsche's opposition to "those concepts that are the "sinister inventions of priest and Church" and that "are forms of systematic cruelty by virtue of which the priest has become master" (A 38). Nietzsche took certain measures to counteract this preoccupation with concepts, one of them being the writing of *The Anti-Christ*. Buddha too took counteracted this preoccupation, though his method was to advocate certain "hygienic measures" (A 20)⁷. It is through these measures, Nietzsche argues, that Buddhism achieves the "cheerfulness" that is its "supreme goal." (A 21). Buddha then, as

⁷ Although Nietzsche does not mention these measures, he is surely referring to Buddha's *Noble Eightfold Path*. This path is described by Ninian Smart as "a path of life that has eight stages, or phases. It involves right views and right aspiration; right speech, right conduct, and right livelihood; right effort, right mindfulness, and right contemplation" (1984, 101).

Nietzsche depicts him achieves a happiness that is similar to that achieved by Jesus, a happiness distinguished by a rejection of false conceptions of reality.

The clues as to whether “we free spirits” experience the same happiness as Jesus abound in *The Anti-Christ*. They do however remain more as clues than as full blown expositions of the kind we received with Nietzsche’s depictions of Jesus. Perhaps the most direct of the clues is this one:

Let us not undervalue this: we ourselves, we free spirits, are already a
 ‘revaluation of all values’, an incarnate declaration of war and victory over
 all ancient conceptions of ‘true’ and ‘untrue.’ (A 13)

What Nietzsche means here is that “we free spirits,” like Jesus, have discovered the truth about reality. To be a “revaluation of all values” one must have transcended all current values, and this is precisely what Jesus achieved. This close similarity between the achievements of Jesus and those of “we free spirits” is surely why Nietzsche in one instance also calls Jesus a “free spirit”: “One could with some freedom of expression, call Jesus a ‘free spirit’ (A 32). Nietzsche gives further hints as to the discoveries of “we free spirits” in his Foreword where he writes that the conditions for understanding “me” include “new ears for new music. New eyes for the most distant things. A new conscience for truths which have hitherto remained dumb,” and finally, “unconditional freedom with respect to oneself” (A Foreword). What Nietzsche points to here are the truths beyond the compass of the everyday, truths that “we free spirits” have discovered. So Nietzsche describes these new truths that “we free spirits” have discovered, and it is clear that they have to do with the same overturning of values that Nietzsche articulates through the person of Jesus. Nietzsche then, in this sense, uses “we free spirits” to point us to the person of Jesus where this philosophy is best articulated.

Why though are Nietzsche’s descriptions of Jesus so glorious and so well

articulated? Why does Nietzsche describe Jesus, who is so obviously the most Christian person, in such laudatory terms when this is a book that is clearly directed against Christianity? This is because Nietzsche's depiction of Jesus is also an articulation of his opposition to Christianity. In this sense Nietzsche's depiction of Jesus stands at the centre of *The Anti-Christ*. Jesus, Nietzsche argues, founded a wonderful, true and realistic faith. Nietzsche describes this wonderful religion in detail. Everything was there, the experiences of pain, the ensuing happiness and, above all, the nature of happiness as an insight into the truth about the world. This however was destroyed through the misinterpretation of the disciples. This argument is borne out by the nature of the comparisons Nietzsche makes with Jesus. Nietzsche's comparisons generally show how different and better other religions are when compared with Christianity. *With Jesus* though *Nietzsche compares through similarity*, showing that Jesus was very similar to Buddha and the voice of "we free spirits." Nietzsche argues that Christianity had it right in the beginning, that Jesus was right and that Christianity is sound at heart but that it was later corrupted. Nietzsche's depictions of the perfection of Jesus are then an implied criticism of Christianity, showing how different modern Christianity is from the religion Jesus founded.

This is nowhere better depicted than with Nietzsche's descriptions of the "glad tidings" that Jesus brings to the world. Nietzsche argues in his descriptions that Jesus' insight into the nature of reality not only set him apart from all structures in the world, but it also formed the basis of his message, of his "glad tidings":

Such a faith is not angry, does not censure, does not defend itself: it does not bring 'the sword' - it has no idea to what extent it could one day cause dissension. It does not prove itself, either by miracles or by rewards and promises, and certainly not 'by the Scriptures': it is every moment its own miracle, its own reward, its own proof, its own 'kingdom of God' (A 32).

This is the faith that Nietzsche argues Jesus founded. This is the faith that lies at the core of *The Anti-Christ*, the faith that Nietzsche argues was corrupted by the first disciples who “had to translate a being immersed entirely in symbols and incomprehensibilities into their own crudity in order to understand anything of it at all” (A 31). What resulted from this inability to understand Jesus, Nietzsche argues, was the “one great curse” that is called Christianity, and it is Christianity as Gary Shapiro points out that embodies the world of opposites. Shapiro notes that “Jesus is the antithesis of Christianity because the real “‘glad tidings’ are precisely that there are no more opposites” (A 32), while Christianity is committed to the antithetical “good and evil” mode of value which Nietzsche analysed in *The Genealogy of Morals*” (1990,200). Jesus, Nietzsche argues founded a wonderful and completely realistic faith. He describes this original faith in such detail so as to contrast it with the Christianity of formulations, dogmas, and decrees. “What are the ‘glad tidings’? True life, eternal life is found - it is not promised, it is here, it is within you: as life lived in love, in love without deduction or exclusion, without distance” (A 29).

Nietzsche’s detailed descriptions of Jesus and Buddha convey a sense of similarity to Nietzsche himself, a similarity which is conveyed through comparisons to Nietzsche’s voice in the text. Most of the similarities compared here have had to do with the psychological and philosophical components of new religious and philosophical discoveries. There are however similarities that reveal aspects of Nietzsche’s personal life. Several biographers have pointed out that Nietzsche lived a lonely life and some have pointed to the link between his perceptions of his alienation from society and his philosophy⁸. In particular his philosophy of “higher selves” who transcend and lead the masses is thought to have been inspired by his peripatetic existence at the fringes of society. Nietzsche’s descriptions of Jesus often convey this sense of alienation combined with a sense of philosophical difference.

⁸One such biographer who makes these links is Ralph Harper, 1965, *The Seventh Solitude, Man’s isolation in Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, and Nietzsche*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore.

Such a symbolist *par excellence* stands outside of all religion, all conceptions of divine worship, all history, all natural science, all experience of the world, all acquirements, all politics, all psychology. all books, all art - his 'knowledge' is precisely the pure folly of the fact that anything of this kind exists (A 32).

Jesus, Nietzsche implies, has discovered the truth about the world, that the realities conveyed by language and metaphysical thought are illusions. Knowing this is what isolated Jesus and, Nietzsche implies, made him the religious figure he became.

Nietzsche, his biographers write, claimed to have discovered the truth about the world, that the realities conveyed by language and metaphysical thought are illusions.

Knowing this is what isolated him and, his biographers imply, made him the iconic figure he became.

CHAPTER 4

"ALL SUFFERING EXISTENCE"

Nietzsche only rarely mentions his famous doctrine of the will to power in *The Anti-Christ*, but it clearly informs much of his characterisation of religion. The “power” that lies at the root of the will to power is variously depicted in *The Anti-Christ*. The most widespread depiction has to do with the straightforward notion of power such as that of the power of the priest to control the weak Christian masses, and the power of the strong individual to resist the priest, history, and Christianity. In this sense, power is a form of strength that Nietzsche opposes with weakness. Nietzsche’s depictions of the power of the priest for instance are always contrasted and compared with the weakness of the masses, whether it be of their instinct for life, or their serving the priest rather than controlling their own destinies. The attentive reader of *The Anti-Christ* will also catch glimpses of another sense of affirmation that has to do with the will to power. At those occasional points in the text where Nietzsche is unable to control his feelings sympathy at the spectacle of Christian history or the spectacle of “modern man,” Nietzsche affirms in an all-encompassing way both the strong and the weak of the spectacle at hand. It is at these rare moments that Nietzsche embodies something he himself describes in *Human all too Human*, as “those very rare cases” when the exceptional individual can feel “those pains that must be seen as the exceptions in the world: the extra-personal, transpersonal feelings, in sympathy with a people, mankind, all civilisation, or all suffering existence” (157)¹. Nietzsche, in his most compassionate and affirmative moods, both understands the will to power and is a manifestation of it. These two senses of will to power contradict each other though, since the first affirms power alone, that is the power of the visibly strong in the world, and the second transcends this by affirming both power and its negation. The motivation for the first we will discover lies in the latter - when the horrific spectacle

¹ Lesley Paul Thiele (1990) characterises Nietzsche’s philosophy as one of “heroic individualism,” and this is nowhere more visible than in his depictions of power. Christianity is just one religion amongst others, and in the nineteenth century it no longer ruled the world in the way it had in the past. Nonetheless, Nietzsche argues that it does still exert a form of control and one that is possibly more nefarious than temporal control. This is control over the minds of individuals, a control that results in a distancing from actuality and the affirmation of false and invented worlds (that of God, heaven, sin, redemption etc.). The heroic individual is one who, in this context, can affirm the suffering of all the individuals in the world.

of world history overwhelms him, he slips into an identification with the visibly strong in the world. This last identification though cannot be taken at face value for the strong in *The Anti-Christ* are always overwhelmed by the weak Christian masses! Clearly the lines of power at work in *The Anti-Christ* cross and negate any set of affirmative and negative identifications that Nietzsche makes.

In Nietzsche's depiction of the history of Christianity all these lines of power are visible, intersecting and diverging from one another, giving the reader an interesting and sometimes confusing view of the whole process. In *The Anti-Christ* it is *pity* that begins Nietzsche's slide from his transcendent affirmation of "the entire madhouse-world of entire millennia, be it called Christianity" (A 38), to his partial affirmation of strength and power. Nietzsche realises that in order to affirm all existence and all history, he must also affirm suffering. Buddhism, Nietzsche realises has reached this stage since it has "the self-deception of moral concepts behind it," and "no longer speaks of 'the struggle against sin' but, quite in accordance with actuality 'the struggle against suffering'" (A 20). In addition Buddhism "achieves its goal" of "cheerfulness, stillness, absence of desire" (ibid.) and in this attains an affirmation of all of life, both the negative and the positive! Christianity however, is the "religion of pity" and it is pity which stops it affirming the whole of life, which actually makes it "*hostile to life*" (ibid.). Nietzsche argues that pity leads to a negation, to a refusal that life is worth living:

One loses force when one pities. The loss of force which life has already sustained through suffering is increased and multiplied even further by pity. Suffering itself becomes contagious through pity. (A 7)

In affirming pity above all else Christianity has destroyed what is strong in life and defended "life's disinherited and condemned" (ibid.). Christianity has gone even further and made pity the basis of its morality; "one has made of it the virtue, the ground and origin of all virtue" (ibid.). Nietzsche argues that when one pities, "suffering becomes

contagious," (ibid.) and eventually life is perceived to be all suffering. In other words, pity gives life itself a "gloomy and questionable outlook," and ultimately one will become totally hostile to life. This hostility in turn leads to the invention of alternate worlds (heaven, God, etc.), so as to compensate for the awfulness of this world².

Nietzsche makes it clear in this section that he wants to rid the world of Christian pity: "To be physician *here*, to be inexorable *here*, to wield the knife *there* - that pertains to us, that is our kind of philanthropy, with that are *we* philosophers, we Hyperboreans" (A 7).

Nietzsche though in affirming only the counterpart to this negation, in affirming only the strong, the cruel, the dominant and the masterful, is prone to the same error as Christianity, affirming the part at the expense of the whole. His slide into this affirmation is enabled by a line of reasoning so subtle he does not notice its illogicality. If the affirmation of suffering (negation) alone results in the mess that is Christianity, then the affirmation of all that is strong and powerful (affirmation) in the world will be good. By excluding one half of all there is Nietzsche makes the same mistake as the one which he condemns in Christianity.

One can trace Nietzsche's slide into an affirmation of strength alone in his story of the development of the Jewish concept of God³. Nietzsche notes that originally "above all in the Kingdom, Israel stood in a correct, that is to say natural relationship to all things" (A 25). Yahweh, the God of the Israelites, reflected this relationship and Nietzsche describes the Yahweh of this first stage in the history of Israel as "the

2 Nietzsche describes this invented world in great detail in *The Anti-Christ* and I refer to it in my chapter "Christianity Versus Science." Here though is one more description of it:

When the natural consequences of an act are no longer 'natural' but thought of as effected by the conceptual ghosts of superstition, by 'God', by 'spirits', by 'souls', as merely 'moral' consequences, as reward, punishment, sign, chastisement, then the precondition for knowledge has been destroyed. (A 49)

³ Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari note this in their *Kommentar Zur Kritischen Studienausgabe* (volume 14 in their critical edition of Nietzsche's works): "Die Quelle Nietzsche's für diesen Paragraphen und den folgenden [A 25], sowie überhaupt für seine Ausführungen über die Geschichte Israels ist: Julius Wellhausen: *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels*, Berlin, 1883 Bücher aus Nietzsche's Bibliothek. Nietzsche's exemplar ist mit sehr vielen Randglossen Unterstreichungen. Anstreichungen usw. versehen." (KGW vol. 14, 440). Interestingly, Nietzsche does not cite this source in *The Anti-Christ*.

expression of their consciousness of power, of their delight in themselves, their hopes in their selves" (ibid.). Yahweh was the God of justice and of nature, embodying both good and bad. Nietzsche describes the morality of this early Yahweh as that of "a god who helps, who devises means, who is fundamentally a word for every happy inspiration of courage and self-reliance" (ibid.). This all changed though because of "anarchy within and the Assyrian from without" (ibid.).

The Assyrians conquered Israel and this, Nietzsche argues, caused the now dominated Israelites to alter their conception of God. Nietzsche describes it thus:

One will understand without further indication at what moment of history the dual fiction of a good and an evil God first became possible. The same instinct which makes the subjugated people reduce its God to the 'good in itself' makes them expunge the good qualities from the God of their conqueror; they revenge themselves on their masters by changing their masters' God into a devil. (A 17)

As a result of the Assyrian conquest, Nietzsche argues, the bad aspect of Yahweh that formerly formed part of the whole, was split off and identified with the enemies' God, and Yahweh became the exclusively good God. The morality resulting from this division is described by Nietzsche as "the antithesis of life - morality as a fundamental degradation of the imagination, as an 'evil eye' for all things" (A 25). Nietzsche clearly dislikes this "divinity of *decadence*," but it is at this point that his disagreement turns into an illogical affirmation of all that is powerful. Instead of retaining as a counterpoint the former God, the God of both good and bad, the God of life, Nietzsche turns and affirms all that is rejected by the good God. This affirmation is obvious in the simple opposition Nietzsche sets up in the following descriptions between his "noble" God who is "strong, brave, masterful, proud," and the Judeo-Christian God who is "the poor people's God, the sinner's God, the God of the sick par excellence" (A 17).

Nietzsche's embracing of the strong, affirmative drive has led some authors to argue that much of his thought is openly authoritarian. Ofelia Schutte in her book *Beyond Nihilism: Nietzsche without Masks*, argues for instance that "Nietzsche argued in favour of increasing the misery of 'toiling men' so as to facilitate for a small number of "olympic men" the production of the 'Kunswelt'" (1984,167)⁴. Schutte bases much of her argument on an analysis of a text of Nietzsche's called "The Means Employed By The Hellenic Will In Order To Reach Its Goal" (KGW, vol. 3, 347-63 & 175-87). This text, as analysed by Schutte, does appear to validate her thesis. Certainly Nietzsche's arguments such as the argument that in order that "an unbelievably meagre minority of humans might flourish; the slavery of the vast majority is necessary" (KGW, vol. 3, 363), reveal that "Nietzsche takes an elitist stance" (Schutte,1984,83). In *The Anti-Christ* however the possibility that Nietzsche takes such a strongly elitist stance is negated by two factors. The first is that Nietzsche's attempts to embrace the world as it is, including the terrible nature of human suffering, negate the possibility of him taking an absolutely elitist stance throughout *The Anti-Christ*. Secondly, when Nietzsche does slide into his affirmation of the strong and the masterful, this is often negated by the contradictions embodied in the positions he takes⁵.

In his characterisation of the history of early Judaism, Nietzsche, as noted, slipped into a comparative schema wherein he affirmed the "noble" God who is "strong, brave, masterful, proud," and disdained the "weak" God who is "the poor people's God, the sinner's God, the God of the sick par excellence" (A 17). Nietzsche uses this schema to clarify what happened when the Jews embraced the weak God in

⁴ Mark Warren in his book *Nietzsche and Political Thought* (1988) takes a similar line of argument to Schutte's but his stance is less aggressive than hers.

⁵ Jacques Derrida argues that these contradictions of Nietzsche's negate Heidegger's thesis that Nietzsche represented "the culmination of occidental metaphysics" (1989,58). In *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, Derrida notes this: "In presuming to penetrate the most intimate reaches of Nietzsche's thinking will, Heidegger concludes that this will still belonged to the history of metaphysics. This might yet be the case - if one persists in the assumption that some single meaning can still be attached to the value of belonging, that this value is not already its own abduction" (1978,115). Derrida proceeds to argue that the contradictions made by Nietzsche when he sets up oppositions that he later collapses, especially those involving the will to power, negate any possible systematising of his thought. Nietzsche's thought, Derrida argues, cannot be formed into a system to which elements necessarily belong. Consequently, if Nietzsche's thought cannot be unified in this way, Derrida argues, then it is impossible to characterise Nietzsche as a metaphysician.

the wake of the Assyrian conquest. Nietzsche argues that when the Jews were conquered their will to power declined, and he notes that “when the will to power declines in any form there is every time also a physiological regression, a *decadence*” (A 17). What Nietzsche is saying is that because of the conquest the Jews became weak, that their will to power declined. Nietzsche then argues that the Jews weakened themselves even further by embracing the weak God: “the divinity of *decadence*, pruned of all its manliest drives and virtues, from now on necessarily becomes the God of the physiologically retarded, the weak” (ibid.). Yet, Nietzsche, in a horribly obvious contradiction, also argues that it is precisely this decline, this weakness made worse by embracing the weak God, that helped the Jews to survive when “faced with the question of being or not being” (A 24). It was this affirmation of weakness, this “contradiction of their natural values,” Nietzsche argues, that made them strong in the face of the Assyrians and internal anarchy! So, ironically, this “depravation,” this preferring of “what is harmful to it” (A 6), is what enabled the Jews to resist the fearsome strength of their opponents. Nietzsche argues that the remaining predicates of the newly pruned God of the Jews were those of “‘saviour,’ ‘redeemer’” (A 17), and that it was this that enabled the Jews to survive; belief that their God alone was the saving and redeeming God.

In another description of this whole process Nietzsche shifts the blame for this affirmation of a decadent God to the priest, arguing that “the new conception of him becomes an instrument in the hands of the priestly agitators who henceforth interpret all good fortune as reward, all misfortune as punishment for disobedience of God, for ‘sin’” (A 25). Nonetheless, Nietzsche’s basic theme remains that the Jews formed⁶ a new conception of God in order to survive possible annihilation. Nietzsche’s focus on the priest takes much of the blame for the formation of the God of the weak off the people, but one cannot but wonder why Nietzsche hates these priests so much when

⁶ Nietzsche does not describe this formation of a new God in terms of “invention,” as he repeatedly does in the case of Christianity, presumably because of the respect he has for the Jews, “a nation of the toughest vital energy” (A 24), and their incredible acts of survival.

they are the strong and dominant individuals in society? Nietzsche even describes the priestly instinct as that of the elect and as inclined to megalomania:

The reality is that here the most conscious *arrogance of the elect* is posing as modesty: one has placed *oneself*, the 'community', the 'good and just', once and for all on one side, on the side of 'truth' - and the rest, 'the world', on the other.... That has been the most fateful kind of megalomania that has ever existed on earth." (A 44)

This priest is the apogee of power, and yet his power comes from the opposite instinct to that of the noble and strong types who Nietzsche would like to see in control. When Nietzsche talks of the ascendant drive of the will to power he describes it in terms of "strength," "mastery," "bravery," and "manliness" (A 5, 14, 17, 24, etc.). When he describes the contrasting decadent drive he inevitably describes its weakness in mental terms, as "cunningness," "intelligence," and using the worst condemnation of all, as "spiritual" (A 5, 14, 17, 52, etc.). The priest gains power from the weak instincts: "And not an outrage with the fist, with the knife, with honest hatred and love! But one from the most cowardly cunning, lowest instincts" (A 51). Paul too, Nietzsche argues, as the first Christian priest, a "hate-obsessed false-coiner" (A 42), used "decadence as a means...to...attain power" (A 24). Nietzsche even admits that in the hands of the Christian priest (and presumably of the Jews) the decadent drive is able to "make of them something stronger than any party *affirmative of life*" (A 25). Nietzsche is even able to make a comparison with Islam based on this drive: "*What* was the only thing Mohammed later borrowed from Christianity? The invention of Paul, his means for establishing a priestly tyranny, for forming herds: the belief in immortality - *that is to say the doctrine of 'judgement'...*" (A 43). Nietzsche it appears struggles to find examples where those driven by the decadent will, the cunning, intelligent, and spiritual, are not made stronger or are not in power and busy ruling.

Gilles Deleuze in his book *Nietzsche and Philosophy* also emphasises the role of the Christian priest in the history of Christianity. Deleuze, following the broad outlines of Nietzsche's history of Christianity argues that in the first phase of its history, Christianity merely followed on from Judaism. The negative force of resentment drove it further, but essentially it acted to continue the original impulse of Judaism: "It [Christianity] follows on from it, completes its project. The whole power of *ressentiment* ends with the God of the poor, the sick, and the sinners" (ibid., 132). For Deleuze the role of the priest is straightforward; the priest presided over the final phase of Christian history. He argues that the Christian priest played a crucial role in the development of bad conscience: "The Christian priest brings bad conscience out of its raw animal state, he presides over the internalisation of pain" (1962, 131). In this the Christian priest redirects the force of resentment "until everything in life develops this same feeling of guilt" (ibid.). When pain is internalised so as to become guilt, Deleuze argues, it is effectively a "multiplication of pain" (ibid.). Deleuze, as is clear from the rest of *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, reads Nietzsche as maintaining a strict opposition between the active (or strong) and reactive (or weak) forces, an opposition in other words that he argues that Nietzsche never drops or contradicts. This is clear where Deleuze argues that "ressentiment" is "a precondition for the priest's power" (ibid.), but he does not realise the central contradiction in this, that in gaining power (active) the priest must have somehow used the reactive drive in an active way. Deleuze completely misses the irony that in almost all the examples used by Nietzsche (at least in *The Anti-Christ*), those driven by the negative will are made stronger or are currently in power and busy ruling.

This theme of the empowerment of the weak by means of the reactive or weak drive also comes to the fore in Nietzsche's lengthy descriptions of belief. Nietzsche argues that belief in the invented world of Christianity, which he further argues is also part of the decadent drive, has made Christians stronger than any affirmation of the actual world could have made them. In charting the history of Christianity Nietzsche once again invokes the opposition between the affirmative and the decadent drives,

arguing that Christianity, following Judaism chose the decadent drive. "Christianity," he argues, is "*not* a counter-movement against the Jewish instinct, it is actually its logical conclusion, one further consequence of its fear-inspiring logic" (A 24). This "instinct" that Nietzsche mentions here is the instinct that led the Jews to form their own conception of God so that they would have something in which to believe in the face of the Assyrians. This, ironically, is the same instinct that Nietzsche deprecates when he maintains that "Christianity has taken the side of everything weak, base, ill-constituted, it has made an ideal out of *opposition* to the preservative instincts of strong life" (A 5)!

Nietzsche maintains this deprecatory tone in his descriptions of the nature of belief. It is belief, he notes, that characterises the Christian, and belief is for Nietzsche "a sign of *decadence*, of a broken will to live" (A 50). He argues that Christianity derived from its oriental foundations the knowledge of the difference between something actually being true and believing that thing to be true. The world of belief is the world of the abstract, a world in which it is "a matter of absolute indifference whether a thing be true, but a matter of highest importance *to what extent* it is believed to be true" (A 23). Nietzsche's argument is that *belief in the invented world of Christianity* removes people from the truth and from the world. He argues that "the pathological conditionality of his perspective makes of the convinced man a fanatic - Savonarola, Luther, Rousseau, Robespierre, Saint-Simon - the antithetical type of the strong, emancipated spirit" (A 54). This is a strange "instinct" indeed that leads to the world of Jewish and Christian belief, an instinct that weakens, that is "base," and "ill-constituted."

Nietzsche however, when he examines the history of Christianity more closely is forced to admit that this instinct that leads to belief is also the "preservative" instinct: "once the chasm between Jews and Jewish Christians opened up, the latter were left with no alternative but to employ *against* the Jews the very self-preservative procedures counselled by the Jewish instinct" (A 44). In order to protect themselves against persecution by the Jews, the early Christians instinctively developed stronger

beliefs - through Paul Christianity developed "the doctrine of a Judgement and a Second Coming, ..." (A 41). All these beliefs Nietzsche argues had nothing to do with the "genuine primitive Christianity" of Jesus which Nietzsche describes in this way:

Not a belief but a doing, above all a *not*-doing of many things, a different being... a different *being*... States of consciousness, beliefs of any kind, holding something to be true for example - every psychologist knows this - are a matter of complete indifference and of the fifth rank compared with the value of the instincts. (A 39)

Yet in this same passage Nietzsche also admits that it is these exact instincts which drive, inform, and motivate Christian faith! "Faith" Nietzsche notes, "has been at all times...a cloak behind which the instincts played their game" (ibid.). This is the final turn in the convoluted pathway that Nietzsche charts in his descriptions of the instincts. Throughout *The Anti-Christ* Nietzsche contrasts the instincts of the strong, brave, and masterful with the life denying instincts of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, but now it turns out that these are all the same instincts. This contradiction is also displayed in Nietzsche's description of the development of Christianity in European history. Nietzsche describes Christianity as having chosen "the *weak* things of the world, the *foolish* things of the world, *base* things of the world and things which are *despised*" (A 51). Nonetheless, it is Christianity that in the face of a "noble antiquity...became master; the democratism of the Christian instincts *conquered*" (ibid.). It is curious that Nietzsche continues in the rest of *The Anti-Christ* to maintain his opposition between the decadent drive and the strong drive in the face of these descriptions of Christianity and Judaism, where the weak drive is the strong drive, where the distinction has been collapsed. Perhaps the reason for this is that Nietzsche is unable to accept the fact that both these religions survived and became dominant despite their embracing views of the world which Nietzsche understood to be life denying.

Most commentators on Nietzsche's history of Christianity, even when they pick up on the theme of power, only follow the broadest outlines of this history, maintaining its coherence and its anti-Christian slant. Since they miss the intricacies and contradictions of this history, one can argue that Nietzsche achieved his intended effect and that *The Anti-Christ* on most readings is an extremely effective anti-Christian work. Ernst Benz's *Nietzsches Ideen Zur Geschichte Des Christentums und Der Kirche* (first published in 1937) is one of the most comprehensive outlines on Nietzsche's history of Christianity but adds little but sources in the way of commentary. Following Nietzsche, Benz argues that the ground of the decline of the Christian church (*Die Gründe des Abfalls*) was the result of the misunderstandings of the disciples (*den Meister nicht verstanden*), and the falsifications of Paul ("*Die verfälschung des Evangeliums zum Dysangelium*" (1952,43)). Another commentator is Karl Jaspers who explicitly relies on Benz but introduces with much more force the idea of power, in particular that achieved through the negative or reactive force of *ressentiment*: "Es ist Nietzsches psychologische Entdeckung, daß das Ressentiment der Ohnmacht, nämlich aus dem Willen zur Macht noch in der Ohnmacht, schöpferisch werden kann in Wertschätzungen, Idealen, Umdeutungen" (1952,29). Like others tracing Nietzsche's history of Christianity though, Jaspers's depiction of this history is a linear one, tracing the apparently inevitable path of the reactive force in the history of Christianity. His plan of Nietzsche's critical history has, following Nietzsche, three stages. The first is an outline of the thesis that Christianity is the end result of Judaism, that it follows on from it and completes its project: "Das Christentum ist in der Konzentration und Intensität seiner letzten Motive ein ganz und gar jüdisches Phänomen" (*ibid.*,31). Jaspers shows how, in the case of Judaism, the priests' distortion of doctrines is the product of the negative will to power. In the second stage Jaspers analyses the central case of Jesus himself, a man standing outside all attempts to categorise and classify him. And finally he charts Christianity's construction of a world of imaginary effects and causes, which he argues is the final turn in Nietzsche's

characterisation of the development of Christianity from the negative drive⁷.

Nietzsche's history of Christianity though is not coherent, as can be seen in the numerous contradictions embedded in *The Anti-Christ*. The need to piece together a coherent history from Nietzsche's depiction of Christianity is, it appears, a function of the commentator's own need for a coherent theory about Nietzsche.

Another intricacy in the history of Christianity, which such commentators regularly miss, is Nietzsche's inability to reconcile the world of nature from which he derives his affirmation of ascendant life (of the strong, the dominant and the masterful), with the reality of the world in which he lived. Nietzsche's explicitly naturalistic argument is that dominance of the weak by the strong is how it is in life, and if this is how it is naturally then we must affirm the strong. In *The Anti-Christ* Nietzsche's sentimental naturalism becomes the norm for most of his arguments about power. That which is strong is naturally meant to dominate and rule is his simple argument. This naturalism really comes to the fore in Nietzsche's examination of the Manu Law Book. Richard W. Larviere, in his article "Law and Religion," locates the Manu Law Book in the vast corpus of Hindu *dharma* literature. He notes that "the distinction between law and religion is one that does not exist in classical Hindu thought" (1987,465). Law and religion both formed part of the *dharma*, which is a system of natural law in which specific rules are derived from an ideal, moral, and external law of the universe. Nietzsche follows the arguments of this book and agrees with its naturalistic premises. Look at nature he says, it "separates from one another the predominantly spiritual type, the predominantly muscular and temperamental type, and the third type distinguished neither in the one nor the other, the mediocre type - the last as the great majority, the first as the elite" (A 57). It is here that Nietzsche once again slips into the perspective of dominance. It is the strong and dominating who say how it is in life, and the weak and dominated who must accept this, and if we are to accept life, we must accept this:

⁷ This schema is also visible in Jaspers's *Nietzsche: An Introduction to the Understanding of His Philosophical Activity* (1965), indicating that Jaspers's understanding of the linear (that is lacking in both irony and contradiction) development of Christianity was crucial for his explications of Nietzsche's morality and general philosophy.

“The order of castes, the supreme, the dominating law, is only the sanctioning of a natural order, a natural law of the first rank over which no arbitrary caprice, no ‘modern idea’ has any power” (A 57)⁸. It is *natural* for the masterly to rule the masses, the “mediocrity.” The acceptance of the mediocre by the elite is their acceptance as subjects - it is not the acceptance of their role from their perspective. The mediocre are needed as “the broad base” of any “high culture,” but they are weak, “a public utility, a cog, a function” (ibid.).

All this draws Nietzsche into an untenable contradiction; he is now compelled to draw a normative boundary around the mediocrity of the lowest caste, declaring that since mediocrity is the essence of the nature of this caste, it is unnatural, unhealthy, decadent for them to triumph over the elite under any circumstances: “The crafts, trade, agriculture, *science*, the greater part of art, in a word, the entire compass of *professional* activity are in no way compatible with anything other than mediocrity in ability and desires; these things would be out of place among the elite, the instinct pertaining to them is as much opposed to aristocracy as it is opposed to anarchy” (ibid.). But when Nietzsche steps out of the *Manu Law Book* and examines history, and in particular into Judeo-Christian history, he is obliged to admit that the perversion is the rule, that the strongest by nature turn out to be the weakest, that the higher and stronger individual is always dominated by the lower and weaker masses. We notice this when we trace the different depictions of Nietzsche’s “the very few” whom he explicitly identifies with the “highest caste” (A 57) in his discussion of the *Manu Law Book*. In the Foreword to *The Anti-Christ* Nietzsche notes that “this book belongs to the very few. ...One must be accustomed to living on mountains - to seeing the wretched ephemeral chatter of politics and national egoism beneath one.” And yet

⁸ Nietzsche almost always associates intelligence and spirituality with the weakness, but here in a divergence from this scheme, he associates these with strength:

The most spiritual beings, as the *strongest* find their happiness where others would find their destruction: in the labyrinth, in severity towards themselves and others, in attempting; their joy lies in self constraint: with them asceticism becomes nature, need, instinct. They consider the hard task a privilege, to play with vices which overwhelm others a *recreation*....Knowledge - a form of asceticism. (A 57)

discussion of this “ephemeral chatter” is precisely what dominates in *The Anti-Christ*. Nietzsche’s antipathy bordering on fear of the masses is perceptible early on in *The Anti-Christ*:

This more valuable type has existed often enough already: but as a lucky accident, as an exception, never as *willed*. *He* has rather been the most feared, he has hitherto been virtually *the* thing to be feared - and out of fear the reverse type has been willed, bred, *achieved*: the domestic animal, the herd animal, the sick animal man - the Christian...” (A 3).

Nietzsche continues in the following section to argue that the occurrence of the higher type has generally been a “chance occurrence,” a “lucky hit” (A 4). This is because Christianity has taken the side of “everything weak, base, ill-constituted, it has made an ideal out of opposition to the preservative instincts of strong life” (A 5). As Nietzsche perceives it, Christianity has waged a war against all exceptional or higher types - “it has forged out of the *ressentiment* of the masses its chief weapon against us, against everything noble, joyful, high-spirited on earth” (A 43). Most of this, Nietzsche argues, has been undertaken in the spirit of democracy, something derived from the doctrine of “equality of souls before God” (A 62). Nietzsche argues that through democracy every elevation has been levelled, every exception annihilated, that democracy has been responsible for the “decline of the entire social order” (ibid.).

Nietzsche’s historical depictions of just how the “majority became master” (A 51), reveal another aspect of his discourse on power. Although Nietzsche has chosen what he regards as nature’s strongest, his choice does not accomplish what he claims it should, because it is only under special circumstances that hardly ever occur that the strong display the strength they possess. As members of the group of the “very few” who read *The Anti-Christ*, we are not given inspiration to live the strong life, but antipathy bordering on fear for those who really do dominate. Our only inspiration might come from Nietzsche’s depiction of antiquity, where, as he depicts it, the

nobility actually were powerful: "The period in which the morbid, corrupt Chandala [the lowest classes] classes of the entire *Imperium* were becoming Christian was precisely that in which the *opposing type*, the nobility existed in its fairest and maturest form" (A 51). It is to the Greeks and the Romans that Nietzsche turns when he faces the entirely disagreeable world of the present. It was here, he argues, in these societies that all that was noble and strong held sway. But Nietzsche's depictions of these societies is generalised and nebulous, representing more an ideal world than a real one. Although Nietzsche draws on every source he can to prove his thesis that strong values, affirmative values, are natural values, and that these values are ones that lead to power, mastery, and control, his affirmations are always referred out of the present to the hazy and suspiciously nebulous world of the past.

CONCLUSION

The Anti-Christ is a book for Christians around the world who are open to difference in the form of comparisons between Christianity and other religions, and who are open to different depictions of the dynamics of Christianity. It is also a book for those who want to pass beyond Christianity but are not fully able to do so because of the Christian schemas that bind their unconscious. For all these readers, if they are attentive, *The Anti-Christ* offers a route out of a modernity informed by Christianity, something Nietzsche refers to as "whole millennia of labyrinth." Nietzsche offers his readers a way forwards, towards an engagement with other religions and philosophies that go beyond the worlds of revelation, metaphysics, and dogma.

The Anti-Christ though is not without its share of errors. Nietzsche's understanding of Jesus for instance is clearly based on his own understanding of the world. Nietzsche does not locate Jesus in his historical or social context and this limits his depiction of him. Furthermore, as detailed in my chapter "All Suffering Existence," Nietzsche's depictions of the histories of Christianity and Judaism are riddled with contradictions. Both of these difficulties though, and others like it, can be understood by locating *The Anti-Christ* in the context of the development of Nietzsche's use of the term "Antichrist." In 1886 in the "Attempt at Self-Criticism" placed at the head of the new edition of *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche asked in a barely concealed allusion to himself: "Who might know the correct name of the Antichrist?" Soon after this, in *The Anti-Christ*, which was written in 1888, Nietzsche subtly compared his own efforts to those of Jesus, which would appear to contradict his earlier identification of himself as the Antichrist. Then in his autobiography, *Ecce Homo*, written in the same year as *The Anti-Christ*, Nietzsche openly acknowledges his

identity: "In Greek, and not only in Greek, I am the Antichrist" (KGW vol. 6, 302). This switching between proclaiming himself Antichrist and identifying himself with Jesus is not a contradiction though¹, since both identities promote Nietzsche's claim to be the Antichrist. Firstly, in *The Anti-Christ* Nietzsche claims to have rescued Jesus from centuries of misinterpretation, be it from the disciples misunderstandings of him, from the intentional deceptions of the priest and theologian. As such Nietzsche rejects the Christ of common (mis)interpretation, and affirms the Jesus that he has recovered. In this sense, yes Nietzsche is the Antichrist, because he opposes the Christ of Christianity. And this does not conflict with his affirmation of the historical Jesus, whom he clearly regards as different from later interpretations of him as Christ. Secondly, Nietzsche's descriptions of Jesus' "glad tidings," because they so closely resemble Nietzsche's own message or philosophy, point us to the fact that Nietzsche regarded himself as a bringer of "glad tidings." In *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche argues that for his culture and time he is the one who shows the way forward:

I contradict as no one has contradicted hitherto, and am nevertheless the reverse of a negative spirit. I am the harbinger of joy, the like of which has never existed before; I have discovered tasks of such lofty greatness that, until my time, no one had any idea of such things. Mankind can begin to have fresh hopes, only now that I have lived. ("Why I am a fatality," EH 7)

¹ Both Eugen Biser in "Nietzsche's Relation to Jesus" (1981), and Franz Brentano in "Nietzsche als Nachahmer Jesu" (1922), argue that this is a contradiction. Both these critics argue that Nietzsche so adamantly wished not to be perceived as holy that he was prepared to contradict and thereby caricature his own position in order to prevent this. Biser and Brentano's argument though undermines the seriousness with which Nietzsche approached his life and the life of others. This seriousness is particularly evident in his statements, examined below, about his perceived role in life.

Nietzsche is the Antichrist in this second sense because he represents the end of Christian culture. As Antichrist Nietzsche is the herald of the way forward out of the "madhouse world" that is Christianity. Nietzsche's examination of Christianity fills him with pain, sorrow, and remorse, and yet he clearly feels that he, like Jesus who pointed beyond the Judaism of his time, points the way forward, in this case beyond Christianity.

Nietzsche wants the reader of *The Anti-Christ* to become aware of what it means to be a Christian and he is not interested in a detailed examination of Jesus' life because this would be besides the point in a book with this aim in mind. Nietzsche realises that humanity lost something when Jesus died and he is filled with remorse at this. And yet he realises that here is another chance, that despite all his contradictions, he represents a way forward.

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